

# socialist review

aotearoa / new zealand

for a socialist & democratic alternative

issue 9 summer 2001/02 \$2

# blood&oil

why the crusade in afghanistan is only the beginning



terrorism • peacekeepers • uncle sam's plan • lord of the rings • media wars



*NO WAR Dunedin march against the war – 27 October 2001*

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## Socialist Review

ISSN 1175-2629

Published by the International Socialist Organisation  
P O Box 6157, Dunedin North, New Zealand  
All subscription/distribution enquiries to  
P O Box 11207, Wellington, NZ  
All email enquiries: [isonz@hotmail.com](mailto:isonz@hotmail.com)  
Website: [www.isonz.homestead.com/sr.html](http://www.isonz.homestead.com/sr.html)

**Issue 10  
(Autumn 2002)  
will be  
available at the  
beginning of  
March. Deadline  
for articles/  
letters:  
15 February**



*Afghan child refugee*



A lot can happen in three months. Less than 24 hours after the last issue of this magazine was posted out to subscribers, the 11 September attacks on Washington and New York took place.

Within days, we were selling a special issue of *Socialist Review*, "Don't turn tragedy into war" (see details on p. 31). We have taken a consistent and active anti-war stance, arguing that whoever was behind the mass murders in the US, its rulers and those of other Western countries would use them as an excuse to attack countries like Afghanistan for

their own geopolitical goals. On p. 4 American socialist Lance Selfa looks behind the fog of deception, while on p. 21 Colin Heath examines Afghanistan's fate as the victim of centuries-old imperial rivalries.

The International Socialists have played a role in building the beginnings of an anti-war movement. On p. 20 we look at NOWAR, whilst on p. 14 we ask whether the United Nations can really be an alternative for peace, as many in the anti-war movement have argued. As we go to press (early December) the media is triumphantly hailing the

Northern Alliance's victory, conveniently ignoring the fact that the Soviets held onto most of Afghanistan for the period of their occupation – but were also defeated in the end. Because of the rapidly changing situation, we are providing longer and more detailed background material than normal in this issue, to help our readers wade through some of the media fog and make up their own minds. Next issue we'll also be looking at our own Alliance – the party formed out of left-wing Labour dissidents that now seems to be going along the same path as old Labour itself. ■

# Behind the Fog of Deception: Washington's

By Lance Selfa



# Real War Aims

All US military operations have justifications produced for public consumption that serve to cover over the real explanations. George Bush I cast the 1991 Persian Gulf War for oil as a noble effort to show that "naked aggression would not stand." In 1999, the US sold a war to preserve NATO's "credibility" as a humanitarian operation to save Kosovar refugees. George Bush II's "war on terrorism" is no different. If Bush was simply interested in "bringing to justice" the perpetrators of the 11 September attacks, he wouldn't be launching a multiyear, open-ended "war on terrorism." Bush's constant talk about "defending freedom" and vanquishing "evildoers" deliberately obscures the geopolitical and imperial aims of the US in this war.

The reason for these deceptions is simple to explain. If the American people knew the real reasons for intervention – as they came to understand during the Vietnam War – they wouldn't stand for it. Strobe Talbott, who participated in these deceptions as Clinton's special envoy to Russia during the Kosovo War, explained:

The American people have never accepted traditional geopolitics or pure balance of power calculations as sufficient reason to expend national treasure or to dispatch American soldiers to foreign lands. Throughout this [the twentieth] century, the US government has explained its decisions to send troops "over there" with some invocation of democracy and its defense.<sup>1</sup>

At its most basic level, Operation Enduring Freedom is

about defending one kind of freedom – the continued freedom of the US to intervene around the world and to bend countries to its will. Bush hopes Enduring Freedom will be his Operation Desert Storm, the 1991 war against Iraq that his father described as the proving ground for a US policy of "what we say goes." Perhaps in his wildest dreams, Bush II believes his "war on terrorism" will become the 21st-century equivalent of the Cold War, with "terrorism" standing in for "communism" as the all-purpose rationale for US imperial designs.

In its current phase as an attack on Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom has allowed the US to advance several long-standing geopolitical aims, of which three stand out: projecting US power into the "arc of conflict" in Asia, eroding Russian influence in Central Asia to gain greater access to Caspian Sea oil and gas resources, and strengthening US hegemony in the Middle East.

## Asia: The next frontier for US domination

Since the end of the Cold War, the US has placed a priority on preventing or retarding the rise of a "peer competitor" whose military and economic strength could potentially challenge US hegemony in the landmass that stretches from Europe to Asia. Most US military scenarios assign the role of "peer competitor" to one of three Asian powers: Russia, China, or India. As the administration's *Quadrennial Defense Review*, issued 30 September 2001, put it:

The possibility exists that a military competitor with a

formidable resource base will emerge in the region. The East Asian littoral – from the Bay of Bengal to the Sea of Japan – represents a particularly challenging area. The United States also has less assurance of access to facilities in the region. This places a premium on securing additional access and infrastructure agreements and on developing systems capable of sustained operations at great distances with minimal theater-based support.<sup>2</sup>

The US defence establishment believes that the most likely “challenger” for regional hegemony in the next two decades will be China. The US views Asia as potentially the most unstable region in the world, a characterisation that gained credence when regional foes India and Pakistan detonated nuclear weapons within weeks of each other in 1998. Unlike Europe, where the end of the Cold War brought a significant reduction of US occupation forces, Asia plays host to Cold War levels of 100,000 troops in Japan, Okinawa, and South Korea. But recent regional developments – from rapprochement on the Korean Peninsula to movements to kick the US out of Okinawa, have made US bases in East Asia more uncertain.<sup>3</sup>

What does this have to do with the “war on terrorism” being waged in Afghanistan? Quite a bit. First, a look at the publicly available map of US army and naval deployments shows that the US is ringing the region with troops, ships, and other military hardware. Whether the US looks at deployments in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and its attempt to negotiate a return to a naval base in the Philippines as permanent fixtures of its “forward defence” remains to be seen. But they would certainly help in the longer-term plan

of the US to redeploy even more of its European-based forces to Asia.

Second, if China is the main “strategic competitor” of the future, US military operations in Afghanistan help to place China into a vice. US military might is now deployed in Japan, Korea, and the Strait of Taiwan on China’s eastern flanks and in Central Asia to China’s west. China doesn’t have the power to stop US projection into Central Asia, and it dare not cross the United States. So it decided to take a limited role of support to the US war in Afghanistan because it:

would extend Chinese influence in Central Asia and thus balance the American extension in the region; it would win gratitude from the US, and in the process a new confidence could be built between the two countries. All these benefits would play in Beijing’s favor on the Taiwan or Xinjiang issues.<sup>4</sup>

China, Pakistan’s ally for more than 50 years, has played a key behind-the-scenes role in gaining Pakistan’s cooperation with the US.<sup>5</sup> China’s long-term goal of becoming a regional power in Asia in the future depends on keeping the US at bay today. So, temporarily at least, China’s interest in preventing the US from becoming an enemy coincides with the United States’ interest in keeping China in check.<sup>6</sup>

The US knows that “stability” in South Asia depends on its finding some way to navigate between Pakistan and India. Since the end of the Cold War, India – a rival to China – has craved a role as one of the chief partners of the US in



Asia. It was the only major country besides Israel to hail Bush's 1 May 2001, speech outlining his "Star Wars" plans. So it came as no surprise that India offered basing rights, intelligence, and political support for America's war on "Islamic fundamentalism." As two establishment military analysts explained the US interest in South Asia:

The United States expects to maintain indefinitely a strong security presence in East Asia and in the Persian Gulf. It would like this presence to be regarded favorably by India, and it would like India at least to understand and preferably to share its view of how to strengthen the security of the region around the Indian Ocean.

The United States looks on the Indo-Pakistani dispute, with its nuclear dimension, as the biggest threat to the region's security, with the dangers of terrorism and of a weak Pakistan close behind. In all these issues, India's policies are crucial to regional peace.<sup>7</sup>

But the US couldn't fully take up the Indian offers. Instead, it oriented primarily to its old Cold War ally Pakistan. Throughout the 1980s, Pakistan served as the main subcontractor to the US proxy war against the USSR in Afghanistan. Pakistan's military intelligence trained most of the mujahideen fighters in Afghanistan, making a special project of the Taliban. Now, the US has forced Pakistan to pull its support from the Taliban. Ideally, Pakistan would like whatever



*Destruction from US bombing in Kabul*

postwar Afghanistan government emerges from the rubble to be a vassal that it can control. Because of Pakistan's obvious influence in Afghanistan, the US has chosen to orient primarily to Pakistan – and to encourage its support with a US\$1 billion International Monetary Fund loan and a multibillion-dollar aid package. But to be able to exploit whatever advantages from either rival it can, the US lifted sanctions against both India and Pakistan.

### **The Caspian Sea oil rush**

Afghanistan sits at the crossroads of an area that may hold the second largest deposits of oil and gas in the world, behind only the Persian Gulf. For that reason, all of the major and minor powers – the US, Russia, China, France, Britain, and Germany – have schemed for a decade since the USSR's



*Cluster bomb and food parcel: spot the difference*

collapse to get their hands on the area's resources. The US staked its claim with a well-publicised 1997 military operation – the deployment of 500 US paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division in North Carolina to the deserts of Kazakhstan. This, the longest airborne operation in military history (12,500 km), was meant to show the world that "there is no nation on the face of the Earth that we cannot get to," in the description of the operation's commander, Marine General John Sheehan.<sup>8</sup> Today's B-2 bombing runs, where US bombers take off from Missouri, bomb Afghanistan, and return to base in a single flight, exceed the global reach of the 1997 operation.

Because the Caspian riches are located hundreds of miles from international waterways, they have to be piped to market. Just what route those pipelines take will determine who the real winners and losers from the Caspian oil rush will be. Since the collapse of the USSR, the US has tried to use its power to make sure that the pipelines reward its friends and bypass its enemies. So, despite the fact that the shortest and most economically

viable shipment route would lie through Iran to the Persian Gulf, the US has campaigned for an 1,770 km pipeline from Baku, Azerbaijan, through Georgia to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. This pipeline (and other similar routes) is aimed to keep Caspian Sea oil and gas away from Iran and the Soviet-era routes that run through Russia. The US has sought ways to drive wedges between the former Soviet republics and Russia so that they will sell their natural resources to the West. This US concern with promoting "independent, sovereign states that are able to defend themselves" (one of Sheehan's explanations for the 1997 airlift) serves the purpose of further weakening the ex-superpower in Moscow. To prevent this, Russia has tried to assert its remaining power over the Central Asian republics (Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan).<sup>9</sup>

US policy in Afghanistan is wrapped up in this scramble for oil riches. In fact, the US and Pakistan sponsored the Taliban's rise to power as a means to create "stability" in the country to pursue these schemes. Today, the Wall Street Journal has joined the rest of the US media in calling for the Taliban's heads. But in 1997, the *Journal* declared, "Like them or not, the Taliban are the players most capable of achieving peace in Afghanistan at this moment in history." The Taliban's success was crucial to secure Afghanistan, "a prime transshipment route for the export of Central Asia's vast oil, gas and other natural resources," the *Journal* noted. The most audacious plan, by Unocal, to build a pipeline across Afghanistan to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan "was based on the premise that the Taliban were going to conquer Afghanistan."

To the US, the Taliban offered "stability" that could assure that Unocal's plans were realised. However, the US began to reverse its policy after the 1998 US embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya. It became increasingly convinced that the Taliban would no longer accept the subservient role the US had assigned. Therefore, the US began to look for ways to replace the Taliban with a more pliant Afghan government – three years before the 11 September World Trade Center attack. By 2000, it could be said that "the United States has quietly begun to align itself with those in the Russian government calling for military action against Afghanistan and has toyed with the idea of a new raid to wipe out Osama bin Laden. Until it backed off under local pressure, it went so far as to explore whether a Central Asian country would permit the use of its territory for such a purpose."<sup>10</sup> In Operation Enduring Freedom, the US went ahead with its plan. With Russian cooperation, the US gained access to two Soviet-era bases in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

This collaboration between the US and Russia could mark the most significant geopolitical shift to develop from the Afghan crisis. Russian president Vladimir Putin quickly offered his support to Bush after 11 September. Then he overrode the objections of his military chiefs to line up the Central Asian republics to provide basing to US military forces. Some reports suggest that Russian special forces troops are participating with the US in the war in Afghanistan. And certainly, Russia (along with Iran) used its pull over the Northern Alliance to cement it behind the Western attack on the Taliban.



Afghan refugees

Putin's actions amounted to an about-face of Russian strategy that had viewed the US and NATO as a hostile force.<sup>11</sup> Particularly since NATO humiliated Russia in pulverising its ally Yugoslavia in 1999, Putin had used the war in Chechnya to reinforce Russian control over its former empire. Clearly, Putin hopes his service to the West will be rewarded with more than a free pass in Chechnya. He wants – as does his main conduit to Europe, Germany – a transformed relationship with the West. Bush national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, an old Cold Warrior and Sovietologist, held out the possibility of a "fundamentally altered" relationship with the West. Putin even floated the possibility of Russia joining NATO – an amazing development, since one of NATO's chief missions has been to counter Russian influence in Europe.

However, Putin (or at least his military chiefs) may rue the day they ever agreed to US basing in Central Asia. On 7 October, the US completed an agreement with Uzbekistan pledging to defend the republic from outside intervention. The agreement "all but removes any impression that the US military presence in the region will be short-lived. It allows US ground forces to remain for a year, and is likely to be renewed, say officials familiar with the talks," the *Wall Street Journal* reported. The agreement is a step toward making "the entire region a Western energy preserve."<sup>12</sup>

### Reasserting American hegemony in the Middle East

The last time Afghanistan figured prominently in US attentions, President Jimmy Carter declared his "doctrine." Following the 1979 USSR invasion of Afghanistan, Carter asserted openly what all US administrations since the 1940s had believed: "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and any such assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."

The US didn't seriously believe the Soviet Union was using Afghanistan as a staging area for a thrust into the Persian Gulf. The "Soviet threat" justified a new policy of direct US intervention into a region made more unfriendly to US interests after the 1979 Iranian Revolution tossed out the main US strongman.<sup>13</sup> To enforce the "Carter Doctrine," the US created the Rapid Deployment Force, later renamed the US Central Command (CENTCOM). CENTCOM oversaw US efforts to "pre-position" tonnes of US military hard-

ware and thousands of troops in friendly states around the Gulf. This deployment in the Gulf gave the US the power to respond immediately to any crisis that threatened its access to oil, and to "hold" the situation until a more substantial US force could be assembled for war. Operation Desert Storm, the US-led war in Iraq in 1991, represented the culmination of the Carter Doctrine and CENTCOM's mission.<sup>14</sup>

The Gulf War rescue of the Kuwaiti monarchy established a "Bush doctrine" as well: "pledging defence assistance to oil-rich conservative regimes against any force that threatens them."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the three major war-fighting scenarios of the US for the Persian Gulf focus on containing Iraq; preventing Iran from closing the

Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf's "chokepoint" as it empties into the Indian Ocean; and defending the Saudi regime from internal unrest or overthrow.<sup>16</sup> These scenarios, plus enforcing sanctions against Iraq and maintaining the "no-fly zones" over that country, further justified the presence of about 25,000 US troops either on land or on ships in the region (with another 155,000 on alert for rapid deployment).<sup>17</sup> Despite the overwhelming US presence in the Gulf:

the US suffers from two Achilles' heels in its role as regional superpower. One, it has been unable to solve the Palestinian question, which again threatens to explode the delicate balance in the region. And two, its own massive military intervention has rendered the Gulf monarchies even more unpopular – and more unstable.<sup>18</sup>

Added to these problems are tensions with US allies that have built over the decade since the Gulf War. These include European and international oil firm resentment at US-imposed sanctions on Iraq and Iran and Saudi attempts to strike a more independent position from the United States.<sup>19</sup> The current crisis in Afghanistan and the "war on terrorism" offer the US a chance to arrest this erosion of its authority in the Persian Gulf. The largest buildup of US forces in the

Gulf since the Gulf War has accompanied Bush's "war on terrorism."

### Contradictions the war will uncover

In launching Operation Enduring Freedom, the US is taking a huge gamble. It is throwing its power into the middle of one of the most unstable regions in the world. Its geostrategic aims in the current war may be apparent, but

they are no guarantee that the US will reach its goals. Bush may have promised that "we will not fail," but the contradictions inherent in the situation may blow the whole thing up.

First, the enormous faultlines in Bush's coalition can erupt at any time. Bush has assembled a coalition of convenience whose members share fundamental antagonisms to each other. Pakistan and India re-

main on hair-trigger alert, ready to go to war over Kashmir. As Pakistan cracks down on Islamist militants, they could strike back with attacks in Kashmir, goading India to respond. Only days before the US went to war, Islamist militants launched the biggest carbomb attack ever in Srinagar, killing 35. Since the war began, Pakistani and Indian forces have launched attacks across the "line of control" in Kashmir.

Georgia and Russia may be united with the US in the "war on terrorism," but Russia accuses Georgia of giving sanctuary to Chechen rebels. Only days after war began, it took its war against Chechnya into Georgia. In response, Georgia threatened to withdraw from the Commonwealth of Independent States and to send its forces to retake Abkhazia, a breakaway province that the Russians currently patrol.<sup>20</sup>

Second, pre-11 September disputes between the US and its "coalition partners" that have been pushed under the rug will emerge again. Russia and China are riding the "war on terrorism" horse as far as it will take them. But will the US give up national missile defense (NMD) in exchange for future Russian and Chinese collaboration? That's unlikely. In fact, Bush has already started to repackage NMD as an "anti-terrorist" weapon. And even if the US issued a number of behind-the-scenes promises and guarantees to Russia, will it give up its plans to route Caspian Sea oil and gas away



from Russian control or allow Russia into NATO? Again, highly unlikely. And with a US military foothold in Central Asia, it's even less likely to give up its Caspian Sea schemes. So Russia and China could as easily revert to their pre-11 September roles as the biggest challengers to the US in the Eurasian area.

Third, the war will pour petrol on political fires already burning around the Middle East and Asia. The sight of the US bully pounding one of the poorest countries in the world, forcing millions to flee or starve, will enrage millions more. The Islamist oppositions from Egypt to Saudi Arabia to Central Asia will gain more recruits to launch more serious attacks on US-allied governments. And any Israeli atrocity against Palestinians carried out while the US is bombing Afghanistan will heighten the outrage. Civil war conditions could develop in countries throughout the region. Only days after the US and Britain commenced bombing, Pakistani forces shot down demonstrators in cities across the country. And the Palestinian Authority (PA) faced its most serious confrontations with Islamists since 1994, prompting PA police to request riot gear from Israel!

Of all of these hot spots, the most troublesome for the US are Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the Taliban's two main sponsors. Within days of the first air strikes over Afghanistan, Pakistani dictator General Pervez Musharraf purged the army to remove potential coup plotters. In the face of large demonstrations and a destabilising refugee flow from Afghanistan, Musharraf called on the US to wind up its war before November, the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Saudi Arabia's interior minister Prince Raif denounced the war against Afghanistan. The normally pliant Saudi regime refused the use of its bases to launch attacks on Afghanistan. As the London Guardian explained:

Officially, the state department in Washington remains "very satisfied" with the Saudi approach to the crisis, but this masks increasing alarm not merely about the governmental response but about potential insurrection that could endanger the Saudi regime.<sup>21</sup>

These tensions will jump enormously – and the coalition will fracture – when the US moves on to its next "anti-terrorism" target. Already, hawks are pushing for Sudan, Iraq, Iran, Libya and Lebanon to be added to the hit list. For US imperialism, it won't be good enough simply to bomb Afghanistan from the sky. Its leaders want to re-establish the notion that the US will dispatch ground troops to enforce its will. But Afghanistan and the Taliban – the world's most isolated government – won't be a big enough prize. To really show that the US can enforce its will anywhere, it will move against another "rogue state." If all of the media chatter and clamour from the right is any indication, Iraq would be the most likely target.

In an incredible editorial, *National Review* editor Richard

Lowry laid out the Right's fantasy program for Iraq. It's not simply the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, but the imposition of a US-run colony modeled on the nineteenth-century British Raj in India:

An American occupation would not last years, on the model of a MacArthur regency in Japan. Instead, the US would quickly – say, after less than a year – hand control over to a UN protectorate, with some Arab input to soothe feelings and a non-American – some anodyne European, such as a Swede – running the show. He would in effect act as Iraqi dictator, but without the brace of pistols. After five years or so the baton could be passed off to an Iraqi government.

The entire effort would represent a return to an enlightened paternalism toward the Third World, premised on the idea that the Arabs have failed miserably at self-government and need to start anew.

The goal would not be perfection, but a pro-Western and reasonably successful regime, somewhere between the Shah of Iran and the current government of Turkey.

It would guarantee the West's access to oil, and perhaps help break up OPEC (the ill-gotten gains from which fund repressive dictatorships and, indirectly, terrorists). And it would be a nice economic benefit to the United States: If the Teamsters like drilling in ANWR [Arctic National Wildlife Refuge], they should love occupying Iraq.<sup>22</sup>

Whether the administration's plans are as far-reaching as Lowry's, we can't say at this point. But there's no doubt that some in the administration share his views. What's more, the administration has already announced plans to conduct a similar "nation-building" operation in Afghanistan, tossing aside Bush's campaign criticism of former president Bill Clinton for "nation-building" in Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans. Making such a scheme succeed portends a Kosovo-like occupation of Afghanistan for decades – a military task that will be "lengthy, costly, and ultimately doomed."<sup>23</sup>

A US campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon will not confront an isolated and ragtag band of terrorists, but a substantial political movement that is heavily integrated into Lebanese society. What is more, Hezbollah's role in driving Israel out of southern Lebanon brought it national hero status, cutting across Lebanon's religious and political divides.

Any move to expand the war to the Middle East will put further pressure on the already tenuous alliance between the US and the so-called moderate (read "pro-US") Arab states. Around the region, millions know the US has maintained a genocidal sanctions regime against Iraq. They know that the US props up dictatorial regimes throughout the region. And they know the US provides political cover and weapons to Israel's repression of the Palestinians. Whether they support Islamists or not, they aren't likely to accept a revival of nineteenth century colonialism under the racist

assumptions of "enlightened paternalism." If the US moves to impose a colonial regime on Iraq or any other country, it will ignite a national liberation movement greater than anything it has seen since the Iranian Revolution. Those with Lowry's delusions should recall what happened to the Shah of Iran.

### A new American century?

The US begins the 21st century in a position of world strength that rivals the great empires of the past – from ancient Rome to Victorian Britain. Its economy accounts for 22 percent of world output, and it leads the world in all of the most cutting-edge technologies. Its military spends more than the next largest 15 militaries in the world combined. And the combined spending of the US and its most loyal allies – the NATO countries, South Korea, and Japan – out-distances military spending in the rest of the world.<sup>24</sup> This dominance has bred the kind of imperial hubris that contributes to dreams like Lowry's.

Yet every empire that thought it could reorder the world in its image has ultimately fallen by the wayside. Imperialism has always generated resistance to it – either from other potential rivals or from peoples and nations it tries to subjugate. Right now, the most likely US "peer competitors," Russia and China, are lined up with the "war on terrorism." But it doesn't take too much imagination to see that they will not accept US leadership forever. And if the US pushes its advantage in Central Asia, it could push them into opposition to US plans again. Russia and China, who counterposed a vision of a "multipolar" world to a US-dominated "unipolar" world before 11 September, might push themselves (or themselves and other countries) forward as rivals to the US in world politics.

Even more immediately, US blustering will provoke opposition from within its own empire. Its power depends on alliances with some of the most corrupt and repressive regimes in the world. Inevitably, the victims of these regimes will fight back – threatening not only the regime, but US power as well. If today's Saudi Arabia is truly facing an insurrectionary threat that the US can't suppress, the US faces the prospect of one of its biggest foreign policy disasters since the Second World War. The overthrow of the Saudi regime may not be imminent, but even talk about the possibility suggests an underlying fragility to US dominance.

As the world's only superpower, the US interposes its power into conflicts around the world. As it did in Vietnam, when it took over France's colonial administration, US intervention "Americanises" conflicts and makes the US a target of any people fighting for self determination. If the US pursues an out-and-out imperialist policy of the type Lowry advocates, then these challenges will simply multiply. Many fear that the US is already setting itself up for a Vietnam-like quagmire in Afghanistan. If it takes its "war on terrorism" to Lebanon or to the Philippines or to Indonesia (as some administration officials have hinted), it could

face two, three, or many Vietnams.

Finally, and most importantly, the US is likely to find opposition at home, and not just from a self-identified anti-war movement. Bush's "war on terrorism" is unfolding in the context of a world recession. In the US, unemployment levels have hit ten year highs and the slowdown in industrial production is the worst since the Second World War. This means that as Bush ramps up the war, millions of workers in the US will be paying for it with job cuts, welfare cuts, and cuts in social spending to fatten the military contractors' bottom lines. As the socialist leader Eugene V. Debs put it in 1918:

[T]he working class who fight all the battles, the working class who make the supreme sacrifices, the working class who freely shed their blood and furnish the corpses, have never yet had a voice in either declaring war or making peace. It is the ruling class that invariably does both.<sup>25</sup>



US anti-war demo

In the space of a few days in September, US politicians' promises of Medicare prescription drug benefits and "saving Social Security" disappeared. Then the Congress handed out nearly US\$15 billion in aid to airline bosses, while refusing to do anything to help the more than 100,000 laid off airline workers. "Corporate America is waving the flag with one hand and stuffing their pockets with the other – at the expense of working people," a United Auto Workers union official aptly explained.<sup>26</sup> As the war drags on and the economy worsens, more people will come to the realisation that they have no interest in this war drive. Then Bush will be exposed for what he did – cynically manipulating ordinary people's outrage at the September 11 attacks to push through his own right-wing agenda. That's the kind of opposition that Bush fears the most.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Mark Curtis, *The Great Deception: Anglo-American Power and World Order* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of Defence, *Quadrennial Defense Review*, 30 September, 2001 (Washington: US GPO, 2001), p. 4. Available online at [www.defenselink.mil/qdr2001.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/qdr2001.pdf). Hereafter referred to as "QDR."

<sup>3</sup> Tim Shorrock, "US faces pressure to reduce East Asian bases," *Asia Times*, 9 October, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Francesco Sisci, "Why China is taking America's side," *Asia Times*, 26 September, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Francesco Sisci, "China walks a fine line," *Asia Times*, 8 October, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> An Israeli-American geopolitics website, [www.debka.com](http://www.debka.com), has claimed that "intelligence sources" reveal that China has infiltrated Muslim fighters into Afghanistan to tie down the US and to undermine US-Russian collaboration. While this scenario is certainly plausible, I haven't seen other reports confirming this. As with everything about this war, consider the source and treat everything you read with a healthy dose of scepticism.

<sup>7</sup> Mandavi Mehta and Teresita C. Schaffer, "India and the United States: Security interests," *South Asia Monitor* 1 June, 2001, available on the Center for Strategic and International Studies Website at [www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org)

<sup>8</sup> Sheehan quoted in David Brindley and Kevin Whitelaw, "Asia's big oil rush: Count us in," *US News and World Report*, 29 September, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> See Michael T. Klare, *Resource Wars* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), especially pp. 1-50 and pp. 81-108, for a description of the great power machinations in the Caspian Sea region. The Sheehan quote appears on p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Quote from Frederick Starr, chairman of the Central Asia Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins' Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, in Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, "Afghanistan, the Taliban and the United States," available on the Media Monitors Network Website at [www.mediamonitor.net](http://www.mediamonitor.net). The Ahmed article, on which much of this discussion is based, is an excellent resource. Incidentally, Starr's insight shouldn't be in question. Until 2001, his boss at Johns Hopkins was Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, the administration's superhawk.

<sup>11</sup> See Alexie G. Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian*

*Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya* (Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> "US indicates new military partnership with Uzbekistan," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 October, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Carter's national security adviser Zbigniew Brezinski later bragged that the CIA had started covert assistance to Afghan guerrillas before the Soviet invasion – to bait the USSR into a quagmire. This further underlines the point

that Carter used the "Soviet threat" to justify a policy of direct US intervention in the Gulf whose real reasons lay elsewhere. See Ahmed, "Afghanistan, the Taliban and the United States."

<sup>14</sup> A good short description of this plan for direct US intervention in the Gulf is Sheila Ryan, "Countdown for a decade: The US build-up for war in the Gulf," in Phyllis Bennis and Michel Moushabeck, eds., *Beyond the Storm: A Gulf Crisis Reader* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1991), pp. 91-102.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Curtis, p. 117.

<sup>16</sup> Klare, pp. 68-78.

<sup>17</sup> These figures come from Anthony H. Cordesman, *US Forces in the Middle East* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 48, 79.

<sup>18</sup> Paul D'Amato, "Blood for oil," *International Socialist Review*, December 2000-January 2001, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> See Fareed Mohamedi and Yahya Sadowski, "The decline (but not fall) of US hegemony in the Middle East," *Middle East Report*, Fall 2001. Saudi unease with its appearance as a lackey of the US apparently delayed the launch of US attacks on Afghanistan.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Cottrell, "Tensions between Russia and Georgia reach new heights," *Financial Times*, October 11, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Engel, "Muslim allies break ranks with US," *Guardian* (London), 15 October, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Lowry, "End Iraq," *National Review*, 15 October, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Stratfor Inc., "Conflict will follow Taliban's fall," 9 October, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Figures from Christopher Helman, "US military spending vs. the world," *Defense Monitor* H August 2001 (Washington: Center for Defense Information, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> From "The Canton Speech," in Jean Y. Tussey, ed., *Eugene V. Debs Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), p. 261.

<sup>26</sup> Lee Sustar, "Bosses cash in on US war drive," *Socialist Worker*, (Chicago) 19 October, 2001, p. 11. ■



# Washington's war crimes

When George W Bush announced that the US bombing campaign against Afghanistan had begun, he declared, "We are a peaceful nation." Not exactly. A look at its history shows that the US is the most violent and interventionist nation ever known. For more than a century, the US government has used military force or covert operations – or backed local thugs and dictators – to enforce its interests around the globe. A full list of US interventions would fill whole books.

Here, Anthony Arnove and Alan Maass compile a partial time line of America's imperialist adventures – and the tragic toll they've taken.

## 1846-48

"We have not one particle of right to be here," Colonel Ethan Allen Hitchcock wrote of the US expansion into territories that were then part of Mexico – but were coveted by President James Polk and the slaveholders he served. The US incited Mexico, hoping to draw it into a war over disputed territory. The conflict caused massive casualties. When it was over, the US controlled all of New Mexico and California, and more of the territory of Texas.

## 1850-57

When an anti-US protest stormed the American foreign ministry building in San Juan del Norte in Nicaragua, the USS Cayne sailed into the port and bombarded the city. This was one of four US interventions in the 1850s. In 1855, a US mercenary named William Walker came to Nicaragua with a band of supporters and declared himself president of the country – with crackpot plans to make Nicaragua a US state where slavery was legal. Robber baron Cornelius Vanderbilt organised a private army to force Walker to surrender.

## 1898

On 15 February 1898, the USS Maine exploded while in the harbor off Havana, Cuba – and that became the pretext for the US war against Spain. The Spanish-American War was justified by US leaders with talk about democracy and human rights. But the US's real goal was to make off with Spain's remaining colonial possessions. With its victory, the US took charge in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Guam and the Philippines.

## 1899-1901

Immediately after the war with Spain, the US military went into the Philippines to smash a movement for independence. The war claimed hundreds of thousands of Filipino lives, with US troops committing numerous mass slaughters. "I wish you to kill and burn; the more you kill and burn the better you please me," General "Howling" Jake Smith told his soldiers.

## 1903-14

The country of Panama owes its existence to the US government. In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt sent two warships to support a revolt – sponsored by US big business – for Panama to secede from Colombia. Five days after Panama gained independence, the US got its reward – a treaty for the building of a canal to link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, something of immense commercial and military value. The US maintained military control over a strip of land called the Panama Canal Zone until the end of the 20th century.

## 1912-33

US Marines hit the shores of Nicaragua to back a Conservative Party revolt against President José Santos Zelaya, whose nationalism threatened US interests. Washington's occupation army left in 1925 – and returned a year later, again to prop up Conservative Party rule. US

troops failed to defeat the liberation army of Augusto César Sandino. But before withdrawing in 1933, Washington established the National Guard under the leadership of Anastasio Somoza. Somoza ordered the murder of Sandino in 1934, and a few years later took power in a coup against the president. The Somoza family ruled Nicaragua with an iron fist for nearly half a century.

## 1914-34

The US sent warships into the waters off Haiti 24 times between 1849 and 1913 – and finally invaded in 1914. During the 20 year occupation, American troops "murdered and destroyed, reinstated virtual slavery [and] dismantled the constitutional system," wrote Noam Chomsky. At least 15,000 people died as a result. When the US finally withdrew, it left the country in the hands of the brutal National Guard.

## 1918-20

The US sent troops as part of an intervention of more than a dozen countries to oppose the spread of the successful workers' revolution in Russia in October 1917. US and allied forces worked with savage reactionaries who hoped to restore the rule of the tsar.

## 1941-45

The US entered the Second World War in December 1941 after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour, something that US leaders had advance warning about. The US delayed its invasion of Northern Europe until 1944 – after the USSR, at enormous cost, had beaten back Germany on the eastern front. The US used saturation bombing against Germany. More than 100,000 people were killed when warplanes bombed Dresden, a city with no military targets. But the US never bombed the rail lines leading to the Nazi death camps. The war against Japan ended with President Harry Truman's barbaric decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The US Strategic Bombing Survey concluded that "Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped."

## 1948-2001

Washington has provided military and economic assistance to Israel from its foundation in 1948 and increasingly after the 1967 war. Israel has long been the largest recipient of US aid – today getting more than US\$3 billion annually, despite its ongoing illegal occupation of Palestinian land, widespread human rights abuses and its brutal invasions of Lebanon.

## 1950-53

Never officially declaring a war, as many as many as two million people died in the "police action" in Korea between the US-backed South and the North backed by the USSR. The fighting "reduce[d] Korea, North and South, to a shambles, in three years of bombing and shelling," Howard Zinn wrote. The Korean War ended in a stalemate, and to this day, the US maintains a huge military presence there.

## 1953

The CIA organised a coup in Iran to overthrow President Mohammed Mossadegh. Mossadegh's crime was to nationalise the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and carry out land reform, threatening the profits of the Western oil giants. The US backed the brutal dictatorship of the Shah of Iran, until the Shah was overthrown in the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

## 1954

President Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala was overthrown in a 1954 coup organised by the CIA. Arbenz had undertaken land reform measures that threatened the United Fruit Company – now known as Chiquita Brands – which ran Guatemala like its private plantation. United Fruit lobbied its friends in the Eisenhower administration for the coup – and helped to carry it out at every level. The coup

ushered in decades of military regimes that led to the murder of tens of thousands.

### 1954-75

US military involvement in Vietnam – at first covert, later an open war – led to more than two million deaths. The US used carpet bombing, napalm, chemical weapons and psychological warfare to terrorise the civilian population. And Richard Nixon's savage "secret war" in neighboring Laos and Cambodia took as many as two million more lives and created the conditions for the rise of Pol Pot in Cambodia. The US brought all of its military might to bear on Southeast Asia. But the Vietnamese resistance and growing opposition to the war inside the US army and at home led to the US government's first major military defeat.

### 1959-2001

From the moment that dictator Fulgencio Batista was overthrown by a rebel army led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, the US government declared war on Cuba. In 1961, the CIA helped to coordinate an invasion of the island by right-wing exiles at the Bay of Pigs, which was defeated. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy brought the world closer than it has ever been to nuclear war in a showdown with the USSR over missiles in Cuba. Despite numerous plots, the US never toppled Castro. But the US economic embargo – which continues to this day – strangled the country's economy.

### 1960-64

After the Democratic Republic of the Congo achieved independence in 1960, the US helped to engineer the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the country's first prime minister. The US backed Joseph Mobutu (who later renamed himself Mobutu Sese Seko). Mobutu took power as a military dictator in 1965 and became one of the world's most notorious tyrants, bleeding the poverty-stricken country dry as he amassed a billion-dollar fortune.

### 1963-65

In 1963, the US helped to remove democratically elected Dominican Republic President Juan Bosch in an army coup. Two years later, an invasion force of 22,000 US Marines landed after falling sugar prices led to a popular uprising against the dictatorship. More than 4,000 Dominicans were killed. Even the *New York Times* admitted at the time that Dominicans were "fighting and dying for social justice and constitutionalism."

### 1965-98

With US approval and support, President Sukarno of Indonesia was overthrown in a coup led by General Suharto. The coup was followed by massacres of peasant organisers, labour leaders and others identified as "communists" on lists supplied in part by the CIA. As many as one million Indonesians were killed. The US approved Suharto's invasion and annexation of East Timor in the mid-1970s. One third of East Timor's population was killed during Indonesia's occupation. Washington backed Suharto to the hilt until just before he was toppled in 1998. "He's our kind of guy," a top Clinton administration official said in 1996.

### 1973

The CIA helped to engineer the overthrow of socialist Salvador Allende, the democratically elected president of Chile. "I don't see why we should let a country go Marxist because its people are irresponsible," then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger explained. The coup against Allende brought to power the dictator Augusto Pinochet, who ruled Chile with an iron fist until 1990. Thousands of Chilean dissidents were murdered and "disappeared" under Pinochet.

### 1979-90

The US backed a proxy army in Nicaragua against the Sandinista government that came to power after toppling the Somoza dynasty. The contras were instructed by the CIA to "kill, kidnap, rob and tor-

ture," admitted former contra leader Edgar Chamorro. "Many civilians were killed in cold blood. Many others were tortured, mutilated, raped, robbed and otherwise abused." When the US Senate forbade funding for the contra army, the Reagan administration organised an illegal scheme to sell arms to Iran and use the proceeds for its dirty war in Central America. The US government's war reduced Nicaragua to one of the poorest countries in the world.

### 1983

Claiming that it was a threat to the US, US Marines invaded the tiny island nation of Grenada in Operation Urgent Fury. The invasion overthrew Grenada's government and helped to make the country a "haven for offshore banks," as the *Wall Street Journal* put it.

### 1989

When the US decided that its long-term friend General Manuel Noriega had outlived his usefulness, George Bush Senior sent 26,000 troops into Panama in December 1989. Thousands of Panamanians were killed before Noriega was seized and brought to Florida to stand trial on drug charges. The US claimed that it brought democracy to Panama. "[B]ut they left all the little Noriegas in place," said Miguel Bernal, a professor of international law at the University of Panama.

### 1991-2001

In January 1991, the US launched the most intensive bombing campaign in world history against Iraq. The country's dictator Saddam Hussein had been a US ally – until he stepped out of line with the invasion of Kuwait. US warplanes deliberately targeted Iraq's civilian infrastructure, reducing the country to "a pre-industrial state," according to the UN. Strict economic sanctions continued after the Gulf War – and are responsible for the deaths of more than 500,000 children under the age of five over the past decade, according to UNICEF.

### 1992-93

Claiming that it was intervening to provide humanitarian assistance during a famine, Bush Senior sent troops to Somalia. US and UN soldiers were responsible for 10,000 Somalians killed or wounded. The intervention complicated relief efforts and encouraged infighting among Somalian factions seeking US favour.

### 1999

The US fell out with another former friend, Slobodan Milosevic, in its war against Yugoslavia. Bill Clinton claimed that the US was intervening to prevent the "ethnic cleansing" of Albanians in Kosovo. But US intervention only escalated the crisis, and Albanians forced ethnic Serbs to flee from Kosovo. US saturation bombing wreaked environmental havoc. Today, the countryside remains littered with the remains of shells made of depleted uranium.

## Find out the facts about the world's cop

Among the resources used to compile this time line are:

Tom Barry and Deb Preusch, *The Central America Fact Book* (Grove Press)

William Blum, *Killing Hope* (Common Courage Press)

Noam Chomsky, *Rogue States: The Rule of Force in World Affairs* (South End Press)

Noam Chomsky, *Year 501: The Conquest Continues* (South End Press)  
Ellen Collier, "Instances of Use of United States Forces Abroad, 1798-1993," Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 7 October, 1993

Zoltan Grossman, "A Century of US Military Interventions," Znet (www.zmag.org)

Sidney Lens, *The Forging of American Empire* (Thomas Y. Crowell Co.)  
Lance Selfa, "US Imperialism: A Century of Slaughter," *International Socialist Review*, Spring 1999

Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (HarperCollins) ■

# United Nations – a force for peace?

by Eric Ruder

Many of those involved in the anti-war movement have argued that the United Nations should be used to resolve the current crisis. But, as **Eric Ruder** shows, the UN has always been little more than a tool of US foreign policy.

The news that the United Nations and its Secretary-General Kofi Annan won the Nobel Peace Prize must have been a surprise for the parents of Nassar Feyath. In 1997, Nassar – who hadn't yet reached her second birthday – died of malnutrition.

Nassar was one of more than 500,000 Iraqi children who have died as a result of crippling economic sanctions imposed by the UN. And this massive body count continues to grow by 5,000 each month, according to the UN's own estimates.

But this didn't stop the *New York Times* from praising the selection of the UN – and the "impeccably tailored" Kofi Annan – as "an inspired choice" for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The idea that the UN is a neutral international body dedicated to spreading peace is a myth. Annan presides over the UN's General Assembly, where most countries of the world have a representative. But five countries – the US, Russia, China, France and Britain – are permanent members of the more powerful UN Security Council, and they have effective veto power over UN decisions. As a result, the UN only acts when it suits the interests of these powerful countries.

As the most powerful of the five, the US has enormous power over what the UN does. If the UN doesn't "follow orders," the US can simply disregard it.

In 1994, John Bolton, a former Bush Senior Undersecretary of State, made these points bluntly, using the US and UN war against Iraq as an example. "There is no United Nations," Bolton said. "There is an international community that occasionally can be led by the only real power left in the world, and that is the United States, when it suits our interests, and when we can get others to go along."

"The success of the United Nations during the Gulf War wasn't because the United Nations had suddenly become successful. It was because the United States, through President Bush, demonstrated what international leadership,

international coalition building, international diplomacy is really all about. When the United States leads, the United Nations will follow. When it suits our interest to do so, we will do so. When it does not suit our interests, we will not."

In spite of its role in overseeing the horrific tragedy in Iraq, some people believe that the UN can play a positive role in "peacekeeping."

But the record shows otherwise. The UN has ignored terrible violence when the US and the other major powers see no advantage to intervening. And when the UN has deployed "peacekeepers," they've often caused more problems than they've solved.

In Somalia in 1993, UN and US troops dispatched to provide "humanitarian" assistance for hunger relief instead tried to impose a government on Somalia. As many as 10,000 Somalians were killed or wounded by "peacekeepers" during the two year occupation.

And the head of UN peacekeeping operations at the time? Kofi Annan. Annan also was on the job when the Rwandan government orchestrated the slaughter of up to one million ethnic Tutsis. Annan received a cable from his field commander in Rwanda



four months before the killings began describing the Hutu-led government's plans to carry out a mass extermination of Tutsis. Annan gave orders not to raid government arms caches.

When a Rwandan government official came forward to reveal the government's plans, Annan ordered the information be turned over to Rwandan President Habyarimana – explicitly fingered by the whistle-blower as the mastermind of the genocide.

Meanwhile, the US – and the UN – deliberately avoided using the word "genocide" to describe the crisis, because this would have obligated both to intervene.

"You cannot count on the international community unless you are rich, and we are not," a Rwandan told an American journalist. "We don't have oil, so it doesn't matter that we have blood, or that we are human beings."

Then there's the example of the crisis in the Balkans. During the 1992-95 civil war in Bosnia, the UN's



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humanitarian mission did nothing to stop "ethnic cleansing" carried out by nationalist leaders on all sides.

"The UN's political role in Bosnia, forced on it by Washington and its European allies, could be likened to that of a rodeo clown during the bronco riding events: bouncing around the ring to distract the audience from the near-misses and full-blown tragedies being played out all around them," Phyllis Bennis wrote in her book *Calling the Shots: How Washington Dominates Today's UN*.

Under the terms of the Dayton Peace Accords – the treaty negotiated in Ohio that ended the civil war and attempted to enforce peace through ethnic segregation – the UN became the administrator of postwar Bosnia. The UN's powers are dictatorial. UN High Representative Carlos Westendorp has removed politicians from office, shut down media outlets and forced through legislation when parties can't agree.

But that didn't stop the West from using Bosnia as a model when it set up a protectorate in Kosovo after the 1999 war against Yugoslavia.

The war over Kosovo was fought under the flag of NATO – because the US wanted to go to war against its former ally Slobodan Milosevic but knew that Russia would veto any action

by the UN. The "peacekeepers" that occupied Kosovo after the war allowed reverse "ethnic cleansing" – with returning Kosovar Albanians driving out the province's Serb population.

Far from championing democracy and the rule of law, the UN provides humanitarian cover for the imperialist aims of the US and the other great powers. If the UN is called on to take charge in Afghanistan after Washington's war, the experience won't be any different.

It certainly hasn't been so far. In the early 1990s, after the former USSR withdrew from Afghanistan, the UN stood by and watched as a civil war broke out between US-backed rebel mujahideen factions.

But now, as US bombs dropped on Afghanistan, George W Bush – who during his campaign last year criticised Bill Clinton's involvement in UN "nation-building" projects – has done an about-face. The UN should "take over the so-called nation-building – I would call it the stabilisation of a future government," Bush declared on 11 October.

But the real reason to involve the UN is to offload some of the financial expense and political risk – and most importantly, to cloak US interests with the credibility of a supposedly neutral

international institution.

"If we can mask our power in – sorry, work with – institutions like the UN Security Council, US might will be easier for much of the world to bear," *Newsweek* columnist Fareed Zakaria cynically pointed out.

*Financial Times* columnist Martin Wolf did Zakaria one better. In an article titled "The Need for a New Imperialism," he describes Afghanistan as a "failed state" because the "government's monopoly of organised violence – a condition for civilised life – [has] collapsed." He calls for a UN "protectorate" to rule the country.

But UN protectorates should be called what they are – colonial arrangements set up to impose "peace" on terms that satisfy the biggest powers, especially the US.

If you're wondering why the UN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001 given its less-than-peaceful record, consider other recent peace prize recipients.

Last year, the winner was South Korean President Kim Dae Jung – despite his government's record of repressing trade unionists and socialists.

Recipients in the 1990s include former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Frederik Willem de Klerk, once the head of South Africa's racist apartheid regime. ■

# the media war

In the last few weeks before the Northern Alliance overran much of Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, a very significant shift in attitudes towards the war against Afghanistan was becoming clear.

### "This War is a Fraud"

Opinion polls showed almost half of those questioned *already* opposed to sending troops, just weeks into the campaign. Among those surveyed, 65% of Alliance voters were against giving military support to the US. At the Alliance National Conference in South Auckland on 10 November, a motion from the floor directing the Alliance Caucus to withdraw its support was only narrowly defeated.

"This war is a fraud" declared one speaker, setting the tone for many others.

This sentiment is now starting to make itself heard in the mainstream media. On 29 October Britain's mass circulation *Mirror* tabloid showed a graphic photo of Afghan victims of American bombing on its front page. "The irresponsibility of this conflict is breathtaking. It is not about terrorism... British forces are little more than mercenaries for the hidden agenda of US imperial ambitions," said the *Mirror*, introducing an article by left-wing journalist John Pilger.

Here the *Evening Post* ran a prominent front page article on 6 November with the headline *War Fervour Fading*, outlining fears that Afghanistan was rapidly turning into another Vietnam "quagmire".

While we shouldn't exaggerate the level of *active* opposition – as opposed to the growing but still largely passive unease – the fact that such strong opposition is being heard in the mainstream press is certainly significant. Just compare it to, say, the Gulf War ten years ago.

Which brings us to an important question: How could anyone support the war? For most of those in the anti-war movement, it must seem obvious – bombing the shit out of one of the poorest countries in the world to make everyone love the US and stop further terrorist attacks? Yeah, right!

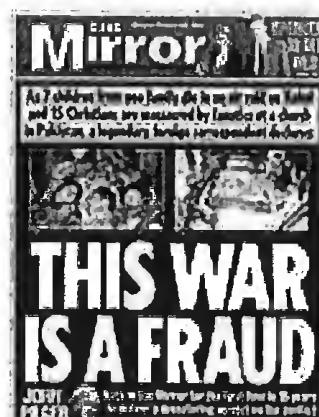
### The Media's War

From the moment the first hijacked plane hit the World Trade Center, most media outlets effectively surrendered editorial control to the US State Department. In what was quickly dubbed "the ideal news story" – a visually stunning, hugely emotional drama unfolding in real time – the usual

pretence at objectivity went out the window as montages of the attacks were endlessly replayed over syrupy background music.

Many "liberal" defenders of press freedom quickly called on the media to censor themselves. These included the *NZ Herald*, which, in an extraordinary editorial on 12 October, *When All the Facts Can be too Costly*, called on the media to censor "enemy" statements:

*"Informing the public must not... entail crossing an invisible boundary which jeopardises the lives of the media's own countrymen and women. Nor must the media allow themselves to be used by enemies whose aim is to destroy its country and its people... When lives are at risk, each medium will be guided by its conscience."*



Obvious, isn't it – in order to defend freedom we must limit it as much as possible.

Meanwhile, Britain's *Guardian* reported that CNN has ordered its reporters to end every report from Afghanistan with a reminder that the

Taleban regime harbours terrorists who supported the 11 September attacks on the US. Apparently, the network feels it would be "perverse to focus too much attention on the casualties or hardship in Afghanistan." Newsreaders on the US service are required to end each report with a formula such as:

*We must keep in mind, after seeing reports like this, that the Taleban regime in Afghanistan continues to harbour terrorists who have praised the September 11 attacks that killed close to 5,000 innocent people in the US.*

Other similar formulas may be used, to avoid sounding too repetitive. The CNN order concludes, "Even though it may start sounding rote, it is important that we make this point each time."

Whilst some dissenting voices are increasingly heard, Op-Ed pieces like Auckland University academic Stephen Hoadley's latest effort, *Civilisation Depending On War Against the Dark Side*, still dominate.

...Per Hal's order, DO NOT USE photos on Page 1A showing civilian casualties from the US war on Afghanistan.

Our sister paper in Fort Walton Beach has done so and received hundreds and hundreds of threatening e-mails and the like.

Also per Hal's order, DO NOT USE wire stories which lead with civilian casualties from the US war on Afghanistan. They should be mentioned further down in the story. If the story needs rewriting to play down the civilian casualties, DO IT. The only exception is if the US hits an orphanage, school or similar facility and kills scores or hundreds of children. See me if there are any special situations...

Failure to follow any of these or other standing rules could put your job in jeopardy.

ENDS

- *Panama City (Florida) News Herald chief copy editor Ray Glenn's memo to staff.*

## Media to Blame?

Against such a barrage it's very tempting to blame support for the war on an all-powerful media effectively brainwashing people. The reality is more complex.

The mainstream media is mainstream precisely because it reflects how the world seems to ordinary people most of the time. The coverage has used two arguments over and over again. On the one hand, a terrible and inexplicable catastrophe has taken place. On the other, Important People are going to take care of it for us.

This pretty much accords with everyday reality for most of us. We know instinctively how little control we have over our lives. Major disasters seem to have nothing to do with folks like us.

The problem with the many liberal-left critics who have taken courageous and principled stands against the war is that they do tend to see the media as all-powerful. But this pessimism does

*continued next page...*

## Isn't it great being conservative!

When two thugs from "SOS" (Save Our Squadrons - a group set up to oppose scrapping the Airforce's fighter jets) violently attacked a couple of peace demonstrators standing quietly on the pavement to the side of the SOS march, the media coverage wasn't quite what you might have expected.

Where even the slightest commotion on a student march or picket line leads to hysterical media rants about violence,

numerous photos and TV coverage clearly showing Aaron Barlow and Gareth Hughes being violently assaulted produced no similar rush of blood to journalists' heads. Suddenly becoming "objective" and "neutral", TVNZ described the two protesters as having "met" the SOS people. The Evening Post could barely contain itself, "Marchers to Parliament yesterday were in no mood for sarcasm as two

students found out." "Some maladjusted child has some peculiar views of his own and just wants to be in the parade," the Post gleefully reported one of the attackers as saying.

Anyway, surely the police, with ample video evidence of the attack, did something? Surely they did. Aaron and Gareth were taken away for questioning. SOS has as its spokesperson right-wing (and



soon to be Socialist Review unemployed) hastens to assure academic David Dickens. Dickens' partner shares a purely coincidental medical practice with Mary English, wife of the new National Party leader.

not acknowledge the quite unprecedented scale of unease about the war at such an early stage. Vietnam, Panama, the Gulf War, Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo – have all left deep misgivings amongst many people who are now moving towards overt opposition to the war.

A great deal of course depends on what actually happens in Afghanistan. If the section of the American ruling class around Colin Powell predominates, the war will end as soon as possible and it is unlikely that anything more than the beginnings of an anti-war movement will be seen.

If, on the other hand, a prolonged and bloody ground war eventuates, and the US spreads the war to other countries such as Iraq, then the situation will be dramatically different.

The growing number of people coming into the anti-war movement will be forced to confront a whole host of issues – from the media's lies to the nature of imperialism and US power and their whole world view. The fact that this war is already less popular at this stage than any other conflict in recent history should give us all hope. ■

Thanks to *Socialist Alternative* magazine for some ideas about the media's role.

## Attack on Civil Liberties

**"Terror Threat in Capital: Bodybuilders Unfazed by Security Scare"** screamed the headline in the Post. Apparently, a "Muslim group" had threatened competitors at a bodybuilding contest in the capital and so a massive security operation swung into place.

Farcical "anti-terrorist" measures have been put in place since 11 September, from the army deployed at airports and the threat of armed goons on domestic flights, to the absurd sight of a rusty old Armourguard caravan parked outside Parliament (presumably to deter any stray 767s from hitting the building?), not to mention the almost unbelievable sight of the Eltham post office being

treated as a major crime scene after the arrival of a suspicious letter from that well-known Al Qaeda base Palmerston North.

The Taliban, by the way, don't actually know where NZ is.

"Are you an Australian?" the Taliban Ambassador Abdul Salam Zaeef's puzzled interpreter asked Seth Robson, a Press reporter in Islamabad.

"NZ is near Australia," he explained, much to the amusement of his Australian colleagues. Zaeef, perhaps fazed by his lack of geographic knowledge, declined to add Godzone to the list of Jihad-threatened states.

All this would be highly comical if it weren't for the massive attack on civil liberties that the "War on Terrorism" is being used as a cover for. Public outrage has forced the Labour-Alliance Coalition to delay draconian new laws. Public submissions were to be banned, and only a small number of individuals and

groups invited to make contributions.

The measures proposed include sweeping new powers to freeze bank accounts, the power to designate organisations as terrorist and make it a criminal offence to recruit anyone to those organisations. The "Terrorism (Bombing and Finance) Bill" could make unions and protest groups into "terrorists" by broadening the definition of terrorism to include economic and property damage. Strikers, for instance, could become "terrorists" for harming the economy.

The bill defines terrorism as any act designed to intimidate or compel the population or government of any country to act in a certain way for the purpose of advancing an ideological, political or religious cause.

## "Voice of the Left"?

War certainly brings out people's (not to mention political parties') true colours. Just listen, for instance, to "left-wing" commentator Chris Trotter. This is what he had to say in his weekly syndicated column, "From the Left" on 12 October:

Those who can supply the best reasons for going to war... win the right to direct and shape its outcomes

...

I joined a "peace march" up Auckland's Queen Street.

"Justice – Not Revenge" declared the bright red banner of the Alliance. Unfortunately, this promising slogan was overshadowed by the seething animosities of unreconstructed Maoists and Trotskyists – all of whose watches appeared to have stopped in 1968.

Their banners and placards dripped with hatred for the United States and all its works.

"Stop America's War" yelled a dozen brown T-shirts. America's war? Nearly 6,000 innocent New Yorkers lives brutally snuffed out in an unparalleled act of terrorist aggression and, suddenly, somehow, this is America's war?

In the end I found the words I was seeking... in the mouth of prime minister Tony Blair.

The Labour leader's solidarity encompassed more than Americans – reaching out to "the starving, the wretched, the dispossessed... they too are our cause."

...

Until I hear more compassionate and persuasive words, I am – and will remain – under Tony Blair's spell.

So spoke the "voice of the left."

# Hope at "Ground Zero"

They say that there is hope in even the darkest moments of history. An inspiring act of resistance took place amidst the devastation of Manhattan on 2 November. Hundreds of angry firefighters stormed "ground zero" – furious at attempts by right-wing mayor Giuliani to cut back on their numbers.

Firefighters fear that the remains of their comrades – along with thousands of others' victims – will end up in landfills as the city authorities rush to clear the lucrative real estate site for redevelopment.

Portrayed as a hero in the media, Giuliani was deeply unpopular throughout his mayoralty for the brutal new powers given to his notorious police force under the "Broken Windows" scheme. Under this draconian policy, police were given powers to crack

dawn on even the most minor of infringements – leading to a massive increase in police violence against blacks and other minorities.

Giuliani has made sure that he was on the platform at events to mourn the 353 firefighters who died during rescue operations when the World Trade Center collapsed. But when firefighters stepped out of line, Giuliani turned on them – returning to the snarling temper tantrums that made him so hated during his eight years in office.

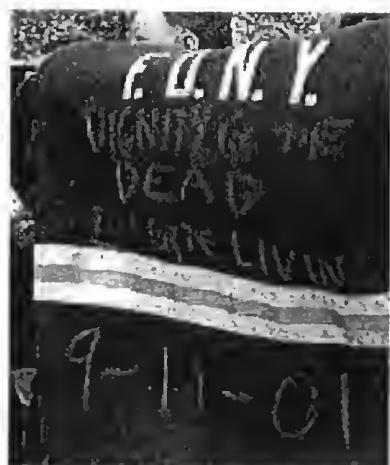
On 2 November, hundreds of firefighters – furious with new restrictions on how many could be at the World Trade Center site to help with recovering the remains of their comrades – marched on "ground zero," clashing with police who tried to bar their way.



The media blamed firefighters for the confrontation, and 12 of the marchers were arrested. But firefighters say police provoked the violence. "We were marching peacefully to ground zero, when suddenly, a handful of police officers waded into a line of marchers and began pulling people out," said Peter Gorman, president of the Uniformed Fire Officers Association.

City officials claim that the new restrictions at ground zero are for safety reasons – that firefighters could be exposed to dangerous chemicals or injured by heavy equipment. But firefighters say they think the decision has more to do with serving the mayor's rich pals.

What's more, the announcement of the



restrictions come shortly after hundreds of millions of dollars worth of gold, silver and other precious metals were located in the rubble. Finding the vaults of the Bank of Nova Scotia, one of the world's biggest precious metals traders, was obviously a top priority for city officials.

Firefighters now fear that Giuliani will turn the cleanup into a "scoop-and-dump" operation – to get the work done as quickly as possible. The behaviour of city officials confirmed firefighters' fears.

For example, the Giuliani administration fueled the disgusting rumor that firefighters organised the protest because they want the overtime. Anyone who has heard firefighters talk about the pain they feel at the loss of so many co-workers knows that this is a crock.

But for Giuliani and the corporate fat cats he serves, the most important part of the salvage operation – finding the money – is over. They could care less about the firefighters that they praise as the "real heroes" of 11 September. ■

# NOWAR !

## (Network Opposed to War And Racism)

### NOWAR has been set up to oppose the war against Afghanistan.

Clearly we must do whatever we can to oppose this war and prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. NOWAR is a coalition of individuals and groups who are working together to this end.

#### What is NOWAR?

The Network Opposed to War and Racism (NOWAR) is a name derived from the anti-war movement in Sydney. In Dunedin there have been three major actions organised by NOWAR, involving a broad range of individual and groups. The objective of NOWAR is to continue these efforts in the hope of building the anti-war movement here.

#### The aims of NOWAR

To urge the NZ Government to withdraw its support for this war.

To oppose all forms of terrorism, including the 11 September attacks and the ongoing terrorism covertly sponsored by the US Government.

To oppose the US led war against Afghanistan, including the use of starvation and sanctions as instruments of war.

In the short term, we call on the US Government to halt the bombing so that food aid can be sent into Afghanistan before the onset of winter.

To oppose the upsurge of racism associated with the war

To oppose the 11 September attacks being used by governments to justify the suppression of civil liberties and democracy.

We call on the New Zealand Government to withdraw the so-called "anti-terrorism" legislation currently before the House on the grounds that it will undermine our civil liberties.

To provide alternative information about the war to counter the disinformation presented in the mainstream media.

#### We are for

a democratic world without terrorism, war, and racism.

In order to stop this war we urgently need to build a broad coalition of groups and individuals opposed to this war. NOWAR has already

organised three major actions and will organise more. To do these we require help.

#### What you can do to help us:

Come along to meetings (email us for latest information – see below).

Look out for posters advertising actions and TURN UP with some friends.

Fundraising activities include a craft stall - phone Penny on (03) 471-7448 if you would like to contribute to this.

Contribute financially by sending a cheque to the address below. Funds will be used to build actions opposed to the war.

Contact us if you have any suggestions or would like to get involved in any way.

#### Contact Details:

NOWAR Coalition,  
C/- P O Box 6157, Dunedin North  
Email [nowar\\_dunedin@hotmail.com](mailto:nowar_dunedin@hotmail.com)

# Background: Afghanistan



by Colin Heath

The mainstream media likes to present the complex history of Afghanistan and other “trouble spots” in simplistic terms that often serve only to further confuse and take attention away from the real causes of their problems. Here, we take a closer look at how imperial powers have devastated Afghanistan over the past two centuries in their “Great Game” for control of the region’s resources.

Afghanistan has been the battleground of imperialist powers for centuries, since the time of Ghengis Kahn and the Mongol empire. It sits on the junction of the central Asian steppe, the Indian sub-continent and the Ancient Persian region, one of the ancient “silk road” trading routes passed through the region and today it is an important potential route for gas and oil pipelines. In the nineteenth century the British and Russian empires competed for military and trading rights over the state, however attempts to assert authority were repelled by the Afghani people themselves. In 1839 Shah Shuja was installed as a “puppet king” by the British. In January 1842 Afghan tribesmen under the leadership of Akbar Khan drove the occupying forces from the country, out of 16,500 soldiers (and 12,000 dependents) only one survivor of the British-Indian garrison reached the British fort in Jalalabad, on a stumbling pony.

Throughout the rest of the century Russia and Great Britain carved off pieces of Afghan territory incorporated these lands into their respective empires, the modern borders of Afghanistan have very little in common with the ancient cultural/tribal groups of the region. The Durand Line of 1893 divided zones of responsibility for the maintenance of law and order between British India and the kingdom of Afghanistan; it was never intended as an international boundary established by legal precedent. Afghanistan, therefore, although never dominated by a European imperial government, became a buffer between tsarist Russia and British India.

The influence of British imperialism was finally ended in 1921 after the third Anglo-Afghan and Afghanistan gained full control of its foreign affairs. The new head of state, Amanullah Khan initiated a series of ambitious efforts at social and political modernisation. He was overthrown in 1929 by conservative political forces intent on turning back the minimal reforms began under his rule. For the next two decades various conservative factions vied for control of

the nation

The British withdrawal from South Asia in 1947 resulted in the split of the former colonies in India and Pakistan; the Pashtun region occupied by the British under the Durand agreement became part of Pakistan. This led to direct confrontation with Pakistan in 1949 as Afghanistan’s Parliament refused to recognize the Durand line as a legal boundary and Pashtuns in Pakistan proclaimed an independent Pashtunistan, their proclamation was unacknowledged by the world and repressed by the new Pakistani government.

In 1953 Mohammad Daud Kahn seized power, becoming Prime Minister, and appealed to the world, particularly the two superpowers, to help modernize the economy and military. The US rejected Afghanistan’s requests, however in 1956 Soviet premier Kruschev and Bulgaria agreed to provide aid to Afghanistan. Under the Daud government some minimal democratic reforms were enacted, the veil or Purdah worn by Muslim women was made optional, women began to enroll in the university which became co-educational, women also began to enter the workforce, and the government. However the regime remained politically repressive and tolerated no direct opposition. Daud resigned in 1963 after continued confrontation with Pakistan.

A new constitution resulted in elections for both houses of the legislature in 1965 and 1969. Several parties ran candidates with beliefs ranging from fundamentalist Islam to the far left. National politics became increasingly polarised, and the democratic process was suspended and the King appointed five successive prime ministers between September 1965 and December 1972. The King refused to promulgate the Political Parties Act, the Provincial Councils Act, and the Municipal Councils Act, blocking the institutionalisation of the political processes guaranteed in the 1963 constitution and disenfranchising the majority of

# *When the Taliban were America's allies*

The following excerpts are from an article published in the *New York Times* on 16 February 1995. The "ragtag army of local warlords" who had a "reign of terror, pillage and heroin-running" are the Northern Alliance – the "Afghan patriots" bringing peace to the country – are the Taliban!

"After a decade of Soviet military occupation and five more years of ruthless civil war, Afghanistan has taken a sudden and startling turn toward peace."

"In a military campaign that has lasted barely four months, a new force of professed Islamic purists and Afghan patriots known as the Taliban, many of whom were religious students until they took up arms last fall, has taken control of more than 40% of the country."

"Along the way, the Taliban have uprooted scores of mujahedeen commanders, the self-styled 'soldiers of God' who took to Afghanistan's wild valley's and mountains to fight Soviet occupiers 15 years ago."

"When the Soviet forces withdrew, these armed leaders disintegrated into a ragtag army of local warlords. In recent years, using guns acquired when the United States was bankrolling the Afghan resistance, they have established a reign of terror, pillage and heroin-running."

"An explosion of resentment against the warlords, hidden beneath a blanket of fear until the Taliban emerged to tap it, has been as much a factor in the Taliban's success as their military might. Now many Afghans say they see in the new force the salvation for their country that they have waited for so long."

Afghans.

Mohammad Daud Khan, the former Prime Minister, sensed the stagnation of the constitutional processes and seized power on July 17, 1973, in a virtually bloodless coup. Leftist military officers and civil servants of the Parcham (Banner) Party assisted in the overthrow. Daud Khan abolished the constitution of 1964 and established the Republic of Afghanistan, with himself as chairman of the Central Committee of the Republic and Prime Minister. During Daud's rule Afghanistan began to move away from Soviet influence and make closer ties with other Muslim nations, especially Pakistan.

Close ties between Afghans and USSR continued and in 1978 the pro-Moscow Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan seized control and began a bloody coup, purging the nation of political opposition on both the left and right. Resistance to hardline Stalinist rule picked up almost immediately; the US began supplying weapons to the opposition forces, especially those aligned with conservative nationalists in exile. The resistance grew as muslim groups joined and the Afghan guerrilla movement (Mujahideen) was born. After a series of factional struggles Nur Mohammad Taraki was named President, and Babrak Karma became his deputy Prime Minister, mass arrests, torture, and execution of political opponents was met by large scale uprisings in most of the country. In December 1979 the Soviet Army invaded to prevent the overthrow of the PDPA regime. Taraki was killed and Babrak Kamal became president, the Soviets manufactured an agreement between Kabul and Moscow inviting the Soviet army in to help protect the new government.

The vast majority of the people did not support any form of Soviet interference in their state and many soldiers defected to the Mujahideen. Public opposition to the invasion was so great that Russian soldiers couldn't walk the streets of Kabul without fear of being stabbed in the back. The invasion drew instant condemnation from around the world and many nations began public and/or private support of the Mujahideen (but only as it suited their particular foreign policy interests). Military backing for Mujahideen came from Iran, Pakistan, US through the CIA, and wealthy Gulf States. Guerilla training camps and religious schools (Madrasas) were set up for Afghans fleeing the war, these camps in Pakistan were run by the CIA and Pakistani intelligence, the funding for these camps came from the US and wealthy gulf states. Volunteers from many Muslim countries headed to the border to fight for the Mujahideen, including Osama bin Laden. It was during this period that Bin Laden learned bomb-making and met many of the volunteers for his Al-Qaeda network. The CIA was quite happy to train these people to kill, maim and terrorise on their behalf.

The Soviet invasion forces used all the modern weaponry at their disposal including tanks, fighter planes, heavy bombers, helicopter gunships and even chemical weapons. Large areas of the country were completely devastated by carpet bombing and heavy shelling, the use of chemical weapons destroyed crops and killed livestock, but most devastating of all were the helicopter gunships that could hunt down troops on foot and horseback and kill them with being in any immediate danger. However the complete air superiority that Russian forces maintained over Afghanistan was not translated to equal superiority on the ground, the Mujahideen proved to be extremely effective guerilla fighters

and with shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles supplied by the CIA, the Russians were fought to a virtual standstill. One cannot help but wonder what lessons US military advisers took from their time training Afghan fighters in this war; Afghanistan was described as the Soviet Union's Vietnam. The truth is that an organised, popular resistance movement can defeat an occupying army, no matter how much military might that army possesses.

The human cost of any military occupation is enormous; the Soviet/Afghan war created over 2.5 million refugees fleeing to Pakistan, two million fleeing to Iran and at least one million internally displaced people. The numbers of people killed remains unknown although most estimates run over one million civilian casualties. The Soviets pulled out in 1989 leaving the economy and infrastructure destroyed as well as large parts of the country littered with landmines, unexploded bombs and large stockpiles of light weapons, many villages had been completely flattened by carpet bombing.

The withdrawal of Soviet forces left the remnants of the Stalinist government to fight the Mujahideen for control of the country. A central figure in the government forces was General Abdur Rashid Dostrum, who was in command of a 20,000-strong militia ruling the northern provinces through terror. He defected to the Mujahideen and helped defeat the PDPA Government in 1992, leaving the Mujahideen as the only military-political force capable of governing the country. Instead of rebuilding the nation and trying alleviate the suffering of Afghan refugees, the Mujahideen government leaders President Burhanuddin Rabbini and General Rashid Dostrum turned their respective forces on each other to gain complete domination over the nation. Both armies were occupying Kabul at the time and as a result of this fighting Kabul was leveled by shelling, rocket attacks and air strikes.

By 1994 the Taliban had emerged from religious Madrasas in Pakistan, under the leadership of Mullah Mohammed Omar, with weapons and training from Pakistani military intelligence and possibly the CIA (the US for obvious reasons denies any involvement in funding or training the Taliban). They fought and defeated all the warlords in the Pashtun regions quickly and took Kabul. General Rashid Dostum then retreated to his power base in the north (while other warlords fled the country), consolidating his hold on an area which covered six provinces with a population of around 5 million. He reached the height of his power in 1997 when he controlled a private mini-state in Northern Afghanistan. While much of the rest of Afghanistan was in ruins, the General grew rich in his stronghold of Mazar-i-sharif (a city of around two million people), from trade with the newly independent states of central Asia and even started his own airline, Balkh Air, flying to destinations in central Asia and the Gulf. General Rashid Dostrum is now an important leader of the Northern Alliance, along with many of his former enemies.

Ismil Khan was an officer in the national army and rose up against the Soviet forces stationed in Herat just months after their arrival in 1979. This initial fray resulted in the death of hundreds of Soviet soldiers. Khan's rule in the city stands out as an exception in the last twenty years. Herat's schools were filled with more than 40,000 children; nearly 50% of whom were girls. But the establishment of a conscript army was not welcome in the traditionally liberal city. When the Taliban launched their offensives towards Herat in 1996, corrupt officials and reports of a lack of funds to pay his soldiers contributed to his downfall. He was captured by the Taliban and held until eighteen months ago when he made a daring escape from Afghanistan. It remains unclear if he is actually inside the country although his forces are currently fighting the Taliban.

Other leaders of the Northern Alliance include: Karim Khalili (Hazara) Leader of the Hezb-e-Wahdat (Unity Party) which claims to represent the Shia Muslim, ethnic Hazara minority and is the main benefactor of Iranian support, Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf Leader of Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan. Former President Burhanuddin Rabbini is the nominal head of the Alliance and members of his government hold key positions in foreign relations. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, foreign minister who has become the Alliance's principal spokesperson and Rawan Farhadi, Permanent Representative of the ousted government to the United Nations (the Taliban has never been permitted to speak at the United Nations)

Osama bin Laden returned to Afghanistan from Sudan after the bombing of US army barracks in Saudi Arabia was pinned on him by the US, who used economic pressure on the government of Sudan to extradite him. He was welcomed by the Taliban, who saw him not only as an ally from the war against the Soviets but a hero of Islam and a fellow Muslim in need of help besides. The Taliban with had control of 90% of the country by 1998, and were the closest thing to real government and real peace the Afghans had seen since the 1980s. The Taliban was not recognised as a legitimate government, (only Pakistan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia recognised the Taliban diplomatically) and the UN placed sanctions on the Taliban denying the people any opportunity to trade with outside countries for much needed food, medical supplies and building materials. The Taliban had no trouble bypassing sanctions and buying weapons etc. from Pakistan and Qatar.

The Taliban are a particularly extreme form of Islamic government, preventing women from education, work or even leaving the house without being covered from head to foot and accompanied by a male member of her family. All television, magazines and other representations of the human form is considered blasphemous and therefore is banned. All attempts at rebuilding educational and industrial development have been halted by the Taliban who keep the nation in a state of underdevelopment in order to maintain

their political supremacy over the people, this runs counter the teachings of Islam as prescribed by the majority of Muslim clerics. Public beatings and executions are commonplace in Taliban Afghanistan, but it is important to remember that in many other countries, mass arrests, torture, and execution of political dissidents is just as prevalent as Taliban abuses. Many of these nations are US allies and their crimes are not considered worthy of the same UN sanctions placed on the Taliban.

In 1998 when US embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam were bombed by terrorists of a still unknown origin, President Clinton accused bin Laden of the crimes and in retaliation Afghanistan and Sudan were hit with cruise missiles. The targets were both claimed to be military-terrorist targets, however the missiles sent into Khartoum, Sudan, destroyed Sudan's only pharmaceutical factory, killing an unknown number of workers. Clinton claimed at the time that this was a chemical weapons factory.

Following the devastation of over twenty years of civil war and new sanctions applied by the UN, Afghanistan is now the poorest country in the world. There is very little infrastructure left, virtually no heavy industry, and most of the cities and towns have yet to be rebuilt after the fighting of the last twenty years. The country remains littered with land mines, weapons and unexploded shells and bombs. Prior to the US's war on the nation over a million people relied on foreign aid agencies for their food as a result of a massive drought currently gripping the country. Since September 11 massive numbers of Afghans have begun fleeing their homes, entering neighbouring countries, despite attempts to close the borders.

This leads to the question: why is the richest and most powerful country in the world using its power to attack one of the poorest and weakest? The attacks on New York and Washington are acts of mass murder that are indefensible by anyone with humanitarian values. This does not justify the new horrors being visited on Afghanistan by US bombing and military operations now underway. The Taliban has remained defiant of the US calls to hand over bin Laden and has at times arrested and mistreated foreign aid workers, as well as violating all human rights of Afghan civilians. The US response has been to bomb basically anything that is not already been destroyed. The attacks were begun with so-called smart weapons such as radar or laser guided bombs and satellite guided cruise missiles, the British and US

Airforce began targeting the only operating airstrips and air control towers in Afghanistan. Moving on to so-called terrorist training camps and carpet-bombing Taliban troops, US troops are in Afghanistan working with the Northern Alliance and other forces attempting to subvert the government and guiding in bombs dropped by US/British planes. US Special Forces have also raided some Taliban bases looking for "terrorists" and Taliban leaders.

The US has begun using a flying gunship known as specter that has six barreled cannons and a howitzer onboard, to attack vehicles and troops on the ground. The largest non-nuclear bombs, known as the "Daisy-Cutters" have also been dropped on the country, these bombs are designed to be as effective as tactical nuclear weapons and devastate huge areas, killing anything within a three mile (4.8 km) radius. They claim that all of these weapons are the latest technology and that this will reduce the number of civilian casualties. However BBC World News carried reports of a single 2,000 pound radar guided bomb "going astray" and killing around 200 civilians in Kabul (at least 15% of laser and radar guided bombs miss their intended targets). The Taliban also claim refugees were hit by gunships shelling vehicles and around 100 were killed in one attack. The bombs have twice hit the Red Cross building in Kabul killing four aid workers and a mine-clearing charity has also been destroyed by US bombs hitting Kabul.

### Afghan women freed?

"The religious police have gone but the burqas remain. Foreign newspaper photographers, under pressure to produce images of the city's rejection of the Taliban can be seen each day persuading a few women to remove these garments. What the photos do not show is the women putting them back on again a few moments later. The fact remains that the Northern Alliance feels the same way about women as the Taliban did - they are chattel, to be tolerated but kept out of real life."

Chris Steven, *Observer*  
journalist in Kabul

targeting mistakes of the US Airforce. The US describes these casualties as "collateral damage" the same phrase used by Timothy McViegh to describe children killed in the FBI building he bombed in Oklahoma City. The corporate media aren't reporting the true horrors of US bombing in Afghanistan because it could put the war effort in danger and it is considered "unpatriotic" by the government and media editors to talk about innocent deaths caused by US troops in the wake of September 11.

The actual amount of food dropped (around 40,000 food parcels per day) could not possibly feed all the starving Afghans and the food drops are US army ration packs that contain food Afghans do not normally eat, with English instructions on how to prepare them. To add injury to insult these packages look very similar to cluster-bomb canisters

that now litter the countryside (around 10% of cluster-bomblets fail to explode on impact and lie around waiting to maim or kill those who stumble upon them). The real goal of dropping food into Afghanistan is to appear concerned about the plight of Afghan civilians and try to defuse the protests against the US bombing campaign. If George W Bush and his advisers were really concerned about the humanitarian crisis they would not have started bombing in the first place.

The US government is still working to shore up its coalition against the Taliban and bin Laden. Pakistan has been the focus of much of the effort because of close ties between the two nations. While military dictator General Musharraf is cooperating fully with the US – including basing US troops in his country – many thousands of Pakistanis have been angrily protesting the bombing and US presence in their country. The Pakistani military has been purged of pro-Taliban generals and is now being used to crush the protests in the northern provinces, killing many protesters, as well as fighting with Taliban troops on the border. In Palestine there have been more clashes with Israeli forces and anti-American protests. George W Bush has been pressuring both sides to make peace so that Muslim anger at the West doesn't affect the "Anti-Terror" coalition.

For his part Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has attempted to stop the anti-US protests which resulted in several protesters being shot dead by Palestinian police. The Israelis have continued their nationalist rhetoric, assassinating Palestinian political leaders, occupying Palestinian land, bulldozing houses and clamping down even harder on Palestinian rights. Yasser Arafat is now unable to leave Gaza after an extremely right-wing Israeli politician Rahavam

Zeevi was gunned down in a Jerusalem hotel in October. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) claimed responsibility and its leaders were arrested by Palestinian police. The PFLP said it assassinated Zeevi in revenge for the killing of its leader, Abu Ali Mustafa, by Israeli forces last August. Israel rolled tanks into Palestinian controlled areas and demanded that Zeevi's killers be handed over to Israeli security forces. The war on terrorism has emboldened many other states (Russia in Chechnya, Malaysia, Turkey) to clamp down on internal dissent and suspend democratic rights in their nations.

In other Muslim states from Indonesia to Egypt there have been large scale and sometimes quite violent anti-American

and anti-war protests. There have also been protests around the rest of the world including all major cities in New Zealand. This is the most effective response workers and activists can have to the unjust wars of our rulers, by exercising our democratic rights and criticising our government's war policies we challenge the claim that the government is representing the people's concerns by fighting such wars. As long as the war continues people will continue to protest and challenge our government's policy towards the war.

All indications from Washington are that this war will not be short and will almost certainly be carried into other "terrorist states" like Iraq. The Palestinian conflict and the possible overthrow of the Pakistani military dictatorship could produce a much larger conflict, particularly if other Muslim governments leave the coalition and oppose the US attacks as well. Ordinary people were never consulted on whether the "war on terrorism" was worth it considering the risk of starting a global conflict killing millions of people.

In all wars it is the workers who do all of the fighting and dying and the rulers of nations and capitalist businesses who reap the rewards. Despite claims to the contrary by US spokespeople, oil, gas and other minerals are an important part of the Afghanistan campaign, the possibility of building pipelines from central Asian oil and gas fields through Afghanistan to ports in Pakistan where US dominated oil companies can control the distribution of this fuel is a key objective for the US. For any such plan to work the US will

need to place a compliant government in Kabul to ensure the smooth operation of US capital in the region, the Afghan people will see very little or no reward from such a scheme.

The current destruction of Afghanistan is not going to make the world a better place. The more unarmed and poor people killed by US bombs, more villages destroyed by tanks, artillery, and bulldozers, will mean more

assassins and suicide bombers attacking symbols of imperialism to continue the cycle of violence. It's the impoverishment of the third world that creates the conditions for the growth of extremist political and religious groups prepared to launch terrorist attacks. Afghanistan is a good example of how nations become, and remain, so underdeveloped. It has numerous deposits of minerals, as well as being on trade routes between south and central Asia, yet it remains devastated and impoverished by the influence of imperialism from Moscow and Washington. Moscow is still sending massive amounts of arms to the Northern Alliance. If the Northern Alliance comes to power they will likely be just as repressive as the Taliban (most of the women under Northern Alliance rule are also forced to wear a



Purdah and excluded from education), that's if the warlords don't turn their forces on each other as they did in 1992.

The problems of such an impoverished nation will only be solved by the redistribution of wealth. A modern education system that all people have accessed to, decent housing and public healthcare, and the rebuilding of industrial areas and the development of modern agriculture. Along with this a democratic society is needed, that allows people to speak their mind without fear of a prison cell, or a bullet. A society where women are treated equally to men, where race, religion, and sexuality are not factors that divide society into suspect camps (as Muslims have become automatic suspects for every crime considered "terrorism" by the ruling class and corporate media in the West). This can only start to happen when impoverished peoples are offered unconditional aid by wealthier countries and the nation is able to rule itself without any foreign interference from superpowers.

### What is the Northern Alliance?

The US government is out to get Osama bin Laden and topple Afghanistan's Taleban regime for "sheltering terrorism." But it had to scramble to come up with an Afghan opposition to the Taleban.

The politicians and their media mouthpieces are now painting the Northern Alliance as heroic and battle hardened opponents of the Taleban's repressive regime. But the truth is a little different. The Northern Alliance is a quarreling bunch of warlords and clan leaders who are cut from the same cloth as the Taleban. "When I was in Kabul last year, I was told time and again that the only thing people there feared more than the Taliban were the warlords of the Northern Alliance," Patricia Gossman, an expert on human rights in South Asia, wrote in the *Washington Post*.

In fact, leaders of the Northern Alliance ruled Afghanistan before the Taleban replaced them in 1996. Their reign was so chaotic and violent that the Taleban was able to sweep across the country and take power in a period of months (sound familiar?). "From 1992 to 1995, fighting among the factions of the alliance reduced a third of Kabul to rubble and killed more than 50,000 civilians," Gossman wrote. "The top commanders ordered massacres of rival ethnic groups, and their troops engaged in mass rape."

The 1992-96 regime was called the Islamic State of Afghanistan (ISA). The ISA took power shortly after the USSR retreated from its military occupation of the country. After Russia's withdrawal, US-backed Islamist rebels splintered into rival factions, leading to civil war. The ISA was the faction that emerged on top, toppling the pro-USSR government in Kabul in 1992.

During the group's four years in power, there was "no rule of law" in areas it controlled, according to a July report by Human Rights Watch. As they warred with one another, each faction terrorised the local population in the

areas it controlled, using summary executions, arbitrary arrests, torture and "disappearances."

In 1995, one faction captured a Kabul neighborhood that had been a former stronghold of another. "[T]roops went on a rampage, systematically looting whole streets and raping women," the US State Department said of the incident. Now the Northern Alliance has become the US's on-the-ground ally in the war on the Taleban – in a repeat of the "enemy-of-my-enemy-is-my-friend" logic that helped to propel repressive Islamist regimes like the Taleban to power in the first place.

"[I]t was the CIA's former allies in the anti-Soviet war who subsequently destroyed the country, and our onetime friends have been responsible for many major terrorist attacks of recent years," journalist Ken Silverstein pointed out in *Salon* magazine.

The US is now set to replay this bloody game. "U.S. officials – who know full well the whole bloody, rapacious track record of the killers in the "Alliance" – are suggesting in good faith that these are the men who will help us bring democracy to Afghanistan and drive the Taleban and the terrorists out of the country," Robert Fisk wrote in Britain's *Independent* newspaper. "In fact, we're ready to hire one gang of terrorists—our terrorists – to rid ourselves of another gang of terrorists. What, I wonder, would the dead of New York and Washington think of this?"

"The terror of the Taleban has been replaced by fear of a new round of bloodletting and ethnic cleansing as rival factions lay claim to the capital," reported BBC journalist Kate Clark. "Kabul has unpleasant memories of the misery caused by factional fighting when the Northern Alliance controlled the city between 1992 and 1996. Already there are signs of abuses and looting."

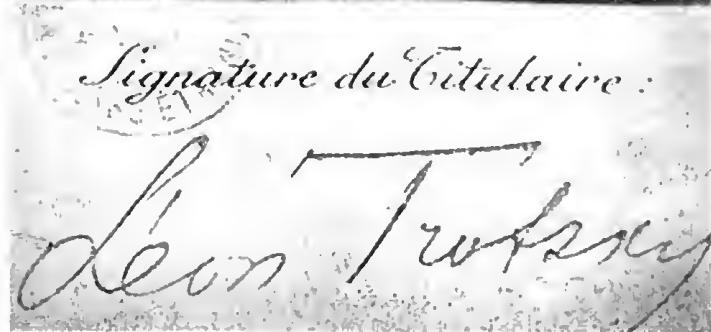
Ahmed Rashid, author of the definitive study of the Taleban regime and Afghanistan, painted a similar picture. "The Northern Alliance faces rivalries in its ranks and with other groups that could cause a renewed civil war," he warned. Rashid described what has happened in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, the first major city to fall to Northern Alliance forces.

The city "was captured by the Uzbek general Rashid Dostum, General Atta Mohammed, a Tajik, and Ustad Mohaqiq, a Hazara. "They are still at loggerheads. United Nations officials are unable to enter Mazar because of the lack of security and general lawlessness." Many of the groups now vying for power across Afghanistan are also sponsored by rival foreign powers.

The Pakistani regime is determined not to allow the Northern Alliance to dominate the country, and will be willing to fuel rival groups among the majority Pashtun population in the south of the country. Former Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani has arrived back in Kabul. He is sponsored by Russia and Iran, which will try to secure their influence as against that of Pakistan. ■

# Socialist Classics:

Leon Trotsky's 1909



Our class enemies are in the habit of complaining about our terrorism. What they mean by this is rather unclear. They would like to label all the activities of the proletariat directed against the class enemy's interests as terrorism. The strike, in their eyes, is the principal method of terrorism. The threat of a strike, the organisation of strike pickets, an economic boycott of a slave-driving boss, a moral boycott of a traitor from our own ranks – all this and much more they call terrorism.

If terrorism is understood in this way as any action inspiring fear in, or doing harm to, the enemy, then of course the entire class struggle is nothing but

## **Why Marxists Oppose Individual Terrorism**

terrorism. And the only question remaining is whether the bourgeois politicians have the right to pour out their flood of moral indignation about proletarian terrorism when their entire state apparatus with its laws, police and army is nothing but an apparatus for capitalist terror!

However, it must be said that when they reproach us with terrorism, they are trying – although not always consciously – to give the word a narrower, less indirect meaning. The damaging of machines by workers, for example, is terrorism in this strict sense of the word. The killing of an employer, a threat to set fire to a factory or a death threat to its owner, an assassination attempt, with revolver in hand, against a government minister – all these are terrorist acts in the full and authentic sense. However, anyone who has an idea of the true nature of international Social Democracy ought to know that it has always

opposed this kind of terrorism and does so in the most irreconcilable way.

Why?

"Terrorising" with the threat of a strike, or actually conducting a strike is something only industrial workers can do. The social significance of a strike depends directly upon first, the size of the enterprise or the branch of industry that it affects, and second, the degree to which the workers taking part in it are organised, disciplined, and ready for action. This is just as true of a political strike as it is for an economic one. It continues to be the method of struggle that flows directly from the productive role of the proletariat in modern society.

### **Belittles the role of the masses**

In order to develop, the capitalist system needs a parliamentary superstructure. But because it cannot confine the modern proletariat to a political ghetto, it must sooner or later allow the workers to participate in parliament. In elections, the mass

character of the proletariat and its level of political development – quantities which, again, are determined by its social role, ie above all, its productive role – find their expression.

As in a strike, so in elections the method, aim, and result of the struggle always depend on the

Only the conscious and organised working class can send a strong representation into the halls of parliament to look out for proletarian interests. However, in order to murder a prominent official you need not have the organised masses behind you. The recipe for explosives is accessible to all, and a Browning can be obtained anywhere. In the first case, there is a social struggle, whose methods and means flow necessarily from the nature of the prevailing social order; and in the second, a purely mechanical reaction identical anywhere – in China as in France – very striking in its outward form (murder, explosions and so forth) but absolutely harmless as far as

**"There is no need to belabour the point that Social Democracy has nothing in common with those bought-and-paid-for moralists who, in response to any terrorist act, make solemn declarations about the 'absolute value' of human life. These are the same people who, on other occasions, in the name of other absolute values – for example, the nation's honour or the monarch's prestige – are ready to shove millions of people into the hell of war."**

social role and strength of the proletariat as a class. Only the workers can conduct a strike. Artisans ruined by the factory, peasants whose water the factory is poisoning, or lumpen proletarians in search of plunder can smash machines, set fire to a factory, or murder its owner.

the social system goes.

A strike, even of modest size, has social consequences: strengthening of the workers' self-confidence, growth of the trade union, and not infrequently even an improvement in productive technology. The murder of a factory owner produces effects of

a police nature only, or a change of proprietors devoid of any social significance. Whether a terrorist attempt, even a "successful" one throws the ruling class into confusion depends on the concrete political circumstances. In any case the confusion can only be shortlived; the capitalist state does not base itself on government ministers and cannot be eliminated with them. The classes it serves will always find new people; the mechanism remains intact and continues to function.

But the disarray introduced into the ranks of the working masses themselves by a terrorist attempt is much deeper. If it is enough to arm oneself with a pistol in order to achieve one's goal, why the efforts of the class struggle? If a thimbleful of gunpowder and a little chunk of lead is enough to shoot the enemy through the neck, what need is there for a class organisation? If it makes sense to terrify highly placed personages with the roar of explosions, where is the need for the party? Why meetings, mass agitation and elections if one can so easily take aim at the ministerial bench from the gallery of parliament?

In our eyes, individual terror is inadmissible precisely because it belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness, reconciles them to their powerlessness, and turns their eyes and hopes towards a great avenger and liberator who some day will come and accomplish his mission. The anarchist prophets of the "propaganda of the deed" can argue all they want about the elevating and stimulating influence of terrorist acts on the masses.

Theoretical considerations and political experience prove otherwise. The more "effective" the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organisation and self-education. But the smoke from the confusion clears away, the panic disappears, the successor of the murdered minister makes his appearance, life again settles into the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before; only the police repression grows more savage and brazen. And as a result, in place of the kindled hopes and artificially aroused excitement comes disillusionment and apathy.

The efforts of reaction to put an end to strikes and to the mass workers' movement in general have always, everywhere, ended in failure. Capitalist society needs an active, mobile and intelligent proletariat; it cannot, therefore, bind the proletariat hand and foot for very long. On the other hand, the anarchist "propaganda of the deed" has shown every time that the state is much richer in the means of physical destruction and mechanical repression than are the terrorist groups.

If that is so, where does it leave the revolution? Is it rendered impossible by this state of affairs? Not at all. For the revolution is not a simple aggregate of mechanical means. The revolution can arise only out of the sharpening of the class struggle, and it can find a guarantee of victory only in the social functions of the proletariat. The mass political strike, the



armed insurrection, the conquest of state power – all this is determined by the degree to which production has been developed, the alignment of class forces, the proletariat's social weight, and finally, by the social composition of the army, since the armed forces are the factor that in time of revolution determines the fate of state power.

Social Democracy is realistic enough not to try to avoid the revolution that is developing out of the existing historical conditions; on the contrary, it is moving to meet the revolution with eyes wide open. But – contrary to the anarchists and in direct struggle against them – Social Democracy rejects all methods and means that have as their goal to artificially force the development of society and to substitute chemical preparations for the insufficient revolutionary strength of the proletariat.

Before it is elevated to the level of a method of political struggle, terrorism makes its appearance in the form of individual acts of revenge. So it was in Russia, the classic land of terrorism. The flogging of political prisoners impelled Vera Zasulich to give expression to the general feeling of indignation by an assassination attempt on General Trepov. Her example was imitated in the circles of the revolutionary intelligentsia, who lacked any mass support. What began as an act of unthinking revenge was developed into an entire system in 1879-81. The outbreaks of anarchist assassination in Western Europe and North America always come after some atrocity committed by the government – the shooting of strikers or executions of political opponents. The most important psychological source of terrorism is always the feeling of revenge in search of an outlet.

There is no need to belabour the point that Social Democracy has nothing in common with those bought-and-paid-for moralists who, in response to any terrorist act, make solemn declarations about the "absolute value" of human life. These are the same people who, on other occasions, in the name of other absolute values – for example, the nation's

honour or the monarch's prestige – are ready to shove millions of people into the hell of war. Today their national hero is the minister who gives the sacred right of private property; and tomorrow, when the desperate hand of the unemployed workers is clenched into a fist or picks upon a weapon, they will start in with all sorts of nonsense about the inadmissibility of violence in any form.

Whatever the eunuchs and pharisees of morality may say, the feeling of revenge has its rights. It does the working class the greatest moral credit that it does not look with vacant indifference upon what is going on in this best of all possible worlds. Not to extinguish the proletariat's unfulfilled feeling of revenge, but on the contrary to stir it up again and again, to deepen it, and to direct it against the real causes of all injustice and human baseness – that is the task of the Social Democracy.

If we oppose terrorist acts, it is only because individual revenge does not satisfy us. The account we have to settle with the capitalist system is too great to be presented to some functionary called a minister. To learn to see all the crimes against humanity, all the indignities to which the human body and spirit are subjected, as the twisted outgrowths and expressions of the existing social system, in order to direct all our energies into a collective struggle against this system – that is the direction in which the burning desire for revenge can find its highest moral satisfaction. ■

## From the "You couldn't make this up..." column:

The *New Internationalist* reported in its October 2001 issue that anti-WTO activists delivered a spoof lecture to an enthusiastic crowd of scientists, engineers and marketing professionals – all of whom thought they were watching an official World Trade Organisation representative.

The 150 experts at the "Textiles of the Future" conference in Tampere, Finland, heard "Hank Hardy Unruh" explain that Gandhi's self-sufficiency movement was protectionist and stupid, and that Abraham Lincoln, by outlawing slavery, had criminally interfered with the trade freedom of the South, as well as with slavery's own freedom to develop naturally. Had slavery never been abolished, Unruh said, today's much cheaper system of sweatshops would have eventually replaced it anyway.

Finally, to applause from the audience, Unruh's business suit was ripped off to reveal a golden leotard with a three foot long phallus.

The purpose of his "Management Leisure Suit"? To allow managers, no matter where they were, to monitor their distant, impoverished workforces and to administer electric shocks to encourage productivity – assuring that no "Gandhi-type situation" could develop again.

"If a group of PhDs cheers at such crudely crazy things, just because it's the WTO saying them, what else can the WTO get away with?" said Andy Bichlbaum of the Yes Men, the imposter's umbrella group.

## Does this make me look less bald?

MPs want changes made to Parliament's rules on TV coverage to take viewers' eyes off their bald spots.

Parliament's standing orders committee is considering banning TV cameras from the galleries and instead installing its own equipment.

ACT leader Richard Prebble told the committee that camera angles from galleries overlooking the debating chamber were unflattering to male MPs. "Instead of us all being shown going bald, you should have them [the cameras] lower," he said.

Prebble's suggestion drew no objections from the cross-party, all male standing orders committee. Speaker Jonathan Hunt said there would also be benefits for women MPs who needed dyed hair touched up at the roots. He had letters from TV viewers asking him to tell two MPs they needed touch-ups, but he had not had the confidence to tell them.

(*Dominion* 2/11/01)

## Socialist Review Notes

The last two decades have not been kind to Left and progressive movements. The combined New Right attacks of Labour and National on workers, Māori, women and the unemployment have damaged the socialist groups in Aotearoa and left them, by and large, in defensive positions. But, with the recent rise in class struggle and the spread of the anti-globalisation movement internationally, our chances and fortunes are beginning to change.

We in the International Socialists see nothing to be gained from pretending to be other than what we are: a very, very small group struggling to grow and to find a wider audience for our ideas. But we're proud of the improvements that we've managed with *Socialist Review*, both in its quality and in its circulation. Our last issue managed to achieve a circulation of around 260. Although a growing number of these sales come from subscriptions, the vast bulk of our circulation comes from street sales: members of the group setting up stalls and talking with workers and students.

In addition to their regular stalls in town, the Dunedin branch of the ISO has – at the suggestion of our comrade Colin Heath – started regular factory gate sales. We have targeted Fisher and Paykel out at Mosgiel, Cadbury's and the public hospital in town, going to these factories before dawn to catch workers going in for their shifts. 16 copies of the magazine have been sold at Fisher and Paykel, as well as a similar number at Cadbury's and the Hospital over several occasions.

In Palmerston North a comrade managed to sell 20 copies of the magazine in one session – at a Brunettes' gig! Copies of the magazine have also become available in Auckland, Christchurch and Invercargill.

*Socialist Review* has also been useful in adding an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist dimension to the struggle against America's war. In the seven days following 11 September we managed to sell 160 copies of the special supplement we rushed out *Don't Turn Tragedy Into War* in the Dunedin area alone. At Wellington anti-war rallies one of members sold several copies.

But, more than ever, *Socialist Review* needs to become YOUR magazine. Send us reports of struggles in your workplace or campus, letters arguing against something in this issue you disagreed with, comments and notices. If you'd like bundles of the magazine to try and sell at your work, contact PO Box 6157, Dunedin North.

Dougal McNeill

# RED WORDS



THIS ISSUE RED WORDS FEATURES AN INTERVIEW WITH SOCIALIST FANTASY WRITER CHINA MIÈVILLE  
+ EVA KOLLISCH'S GIRL IN MOVEMENT REVIEWED

## Sick of Lord of the Rings Yet?

### Fantasy and revolution: an interview with China Miéville

A few hundred million bucks will be wasted on turning JRR Tolkein's phenomenally awful *Lord of the Rings* trilogy into film.

But is "Fantasy" necessarily reactionary?

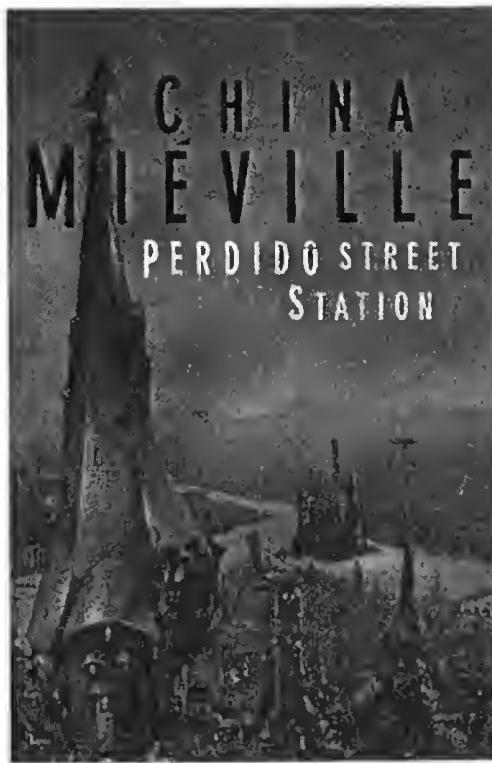
China Miéville (and yes that *is* his real name) has set himself the unenviable task of reinventing the Fantasy genre from the ground up. And it looks like he may well be on the way to achieving it.

His second novel, *Perdido Street Station*, has received widespread critical acclaim. Set in the vast city-state of New Crobuzon, itself far and away the central character of the story, against a background of racism, class struggle and dictatorship among alien races, it manages to raise all kinds of issues that a blunter approach might render too difficult. But its characters are far from one

dimensional. Isaac, in particular, the renegade scientist and lover of alien "khepri" Lin, remains morally ambiguous.

Miéville is an active revolutionary socialist and there are a couple of great hidden digs at his comrades in the novel, including an underground radical newspaper, the *Runagate Rampant*, with a "What We Think" column. *Perdido Street Station* also reflects some of the despair revolutionaries sometimes feel - in the book the main characters save the entire city at enormous personal cost but the population remains oblivious - damn those ungrateful masses! And Miéville's 1.2% vote as the Socialist Alliance candidate in the Regent's Park and Kensington North seat in last June's British general election can't have helped that much.

Still, *Perdido Street Station* is a fascinating story with even greater interest for all those with a commitment to bringing about



progressive change. A second book in the New Crobuzon series, *The Scar*, which Miéville says will be "set in the same milleu...but not a direct sequel" is due out in the next few months.

Below are highlights of a discussion between John Newsinger and China Miéville on the relationship between Fantasy and revolution. The full interview can be read online at <http://www.isj1text.fsnet.co.uk/pubs/isj88/newsinger.htm>

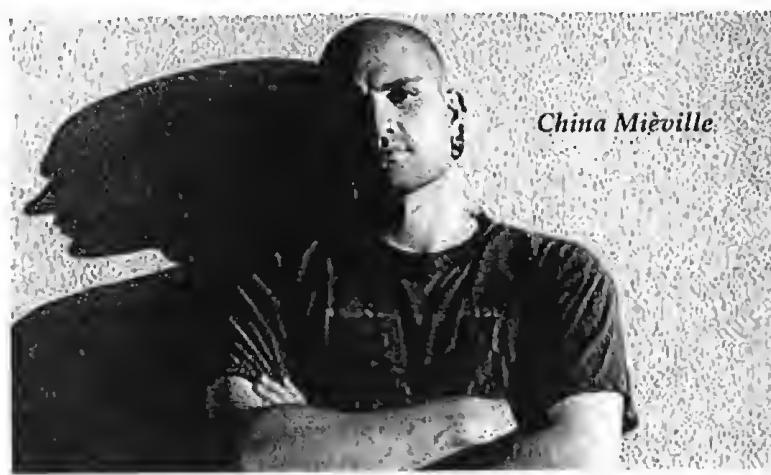
**JN: Why is fantasy literature of interest to socialists?**

*China*: Fantasy's of interest to *me* because I grew up on it, and – along with horror and science fiction (SF), three inextricably linked genres – it's still the stuff that I love to read.

For socialists in general, it seems to me that there are three main reasons. The first is a question of mass culture. Look at a bestseller list: Stephen King, J K Rowling and Terry Pratchett are up there in neon lights. Tolkien is one of the most popular writers of the century. I think we should be interested in why certain artistic forms and genres are popular, and try to understand them.

The second factor is that fantasy, SF and horror are completely denigrated as vulgar and sub-literary by mainstream critics. I'd say that socialists' antennae should be raised by counter-cultures, subcultures and alternatives to "polite" taste. I'm suspicious any time the semi-official arbiters of "quality" tell us, with thinly veiled snobbery, that something is beneath their dignity. (I'm not suggesting that marginality is an automatic badge of quality, of course.)

Finally, and most intriguingly, there seems to be an odd affinity between radical politics and fantastic fiction. There are a number of writers of fantasy and SF who have serious left politics of some stripe. Iain Banks is a socialist, Ken MacLeod and Steven Brust are Trotskyists, Ursula Le Guin and Michael Moorcock are left anarchists, and there are plenty of others, right the way back to William Morris and before. Look at Surrealism, arguably the high point of the fantastic in the arts, and a movement many of whose adherents saw systematic socialist politics as inextricable to their aesthetic. Of course, there are plenty of excellent fantasy writers who aren't political, or who are right wing, but I think the size of the minority at least begs the question as to whether there's something in the form of the writing that lends itself to radical or subversive aesthetics.



**JN: Why has fantasy literature so often appeared to be conservative with a small 'c'?**

*China*: The quick answer to why fantasy looks so conservative is that for a long time a huge amount of it has been. If you look at stereotypical "epic" or "high" fantasy,

you're talking about a genre set in magical worlds with some pretty vile ideas. They tend to be based on feudalism lite: the idea, for example, that if there's a problem with the ruler of the kingdom it's because he's a *bad* king, as opposed to a *king*. If the peasants are visible, they're likely to be good simple folk rather than downtrodden wretches (except if it's a *bad*

kingdom...). Strong men protect curvaceous women. Superheroic protagonists stamp their will on history like characters in Nietzschean wet dreams, but at the same time things are determined by fate rather than social agency. Social threats are pathological, invading from outside rather than being born from within. Morality is absolute, with characters – and often whole races – lining up to fall into pigeonholes with "good" and "evil" written on them.

Although an awful lot of books do fit that stereotype to various degrees, it's important to remember that you're *not* talking about fantasy in general here, but about a particular historical stream within it – a stream which has got massive since the 1960s. You also have to remember that many works within that tradition question or undermine its more conservative aspects. However, it is true that the hold of that conservatism is strong in the genre, and it's also true that that particular post-Tolkien stream is what most people these days *mean* when they talk about "fantasy".

**JN: How would you assess the contributions of JRR Tolkien and Mervyn Peake?**

*China*: Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* is undoubtedly the most influential fantasy book ever written. It is the paradigm for the kind of cod-epic, conservative secondary world fantasies discussed above. Obviously there were writers before Tolkien who were very influential – but Tolkien brought various elements to fantasy that made him central. More than previous writers he constructed an elaborate history, geography, linguistics, mythology, etc for his invented world, and fitted his narrative into that.

The sometimes obsessive focus on the secondary world is typical of post-1960s fantasy. It's easy to mock, but I

think it can be a very interesting kind of project. It often involves great creativity and inventiveness, and it's a very powerful way for effecting the particularly strong kind of suspension of disbelief that fantasy involves. That's why fantasy fans are often so neurotic about the maintenance of consistency – authors who lose track of their own world and contradict themselves can't get away with it. (It's what I think of as "geek critique": "In book two of the *Elfmoot* Quintilogy you said the Redfang mountains were *two* days ride north of the city, but in book four it takes Bronmor *three* days to get there...")

Tolkien's worldview was resolutely rural, petty bourgeois, conservative, anti-modernist, misanthropically Christian and anti-intellectual. That comes across very strongly in his fiction and his non-fiction. Michael Moorcock has written brilliantly on this in his book *Wizardry and Wild Romance* (1987):

*The little hills and woods of that Surrey of the mind, the Shire [where the protagonist "hobbits" live], are "safe" but the wild landscapes everywhere beyond the Shire are "dangerous" ... Lord of the Rings is a pernicious confirmation of the values of a morally bankrupt middle class... If the Shire is a suburb garden, Sauron [the "evil" dark lord] and his henchmen are that old bourgeois bugaboo, the mob – mindless football supporters throwing their beer bottles over the fence – the worst aspect of modern urban society represented as the whole by a fearful, backward-yearning class.*

In opposing what he called the Robot Age, Tolkien counterposes it with a past that of course never existed. He has no systematic opposition to modernity – just a terrified wittering about "better days". He opposes chaos with moderation, which is why his "revolt" against modernity is in fact just a grumbling quiescence.

For Tolkien, the function of his fantasy fiction is "consolation". If you read his essay "On Fairy Tales" you find that, for him, central to fantasy is "the consolation of the happy ending". He pretends that such a happy ending is something that occurs "miraculously", "never to be counted on to recur". But that pretence of contingency is idiotic, in that *immediately previously* he claims that "all complete fairy stories must have it [the happy ending]. It is its highest function." In other words, far from "never being counted to recur", the writer and reader know that to qualify as fantasy, a "consolatory" happy ending will recur in *every* story, and you have a theory of fantasy in which "consolation" is a matter of *policy*. It's no surprise that this kind of fantasy is conservative. Tolkien's essay is as close as it gets to most modern fantasy's *charter*, and he's *defined* fantasy as literature which mollycoddles the reader rather than challenging them.

In Tolkien, the reader is intended to be consoled by the idea that systemic problems come from outside agitators, and that *decent people* happy with the way things were will win in the end. This is fantasy as literary comfort food. Unfortunately, a lot of Tolkien's heirs – who may not share

his politics at all – have taken on many tropes that embed a lot of those notions in their fantasy.

Peake is just incomparably better. His writing is textured and lush, his ideas are complex, his characters defy pigeonholes. The politics embedded in the *Gormenghast* trilogy are sometimes tragic, and never simplistic. Peake is one of the few writers of fantasy that mainstream critics treat with respect. It's true that Peake doesn't fit neatly into the genre – though he's revered by fantasy fans – and didn't have the sense of writing in a genre tradition, unlike most fantasy writers. He's inside and outside fantasy at the same time.

I think that's what gave his writing such a sense of uniqueness – it's hard to trace influences on Peake (in genre and out). And although his influence has been very strong, it's been quite diffuse and nebulous. It's nowhere near as strong, for example, as *Lord of the Rings*, which was easily and totally assimilated into the genre of fantasy.

The nicest thing anyone ever said about *Perdido Street Station* was that it read like a fantasy book written in an alternate world where the *Gormenghast* trilogy rather than *Lord of the Rings* was the most influential work in the genre.

**JN: What do you see as the relationship between literary production and revolutionary politics?**

**China:** When I write a novel I do it to tell a story and describe a world that keeps readers interested in turning pages. My job in that book is not to convince people of socialism – a 700-page fantasy would be a spectacularly inefficient mode of propaganda. But obviously as a political writer of fiction it's inevitable that I'm a writer of political fiction.

I certainly try to engage with political ideas in my books. By doing so in fantasy, which has such a conservative tradition, you're engaging both with politics in general and with the politics of the genre you write in. There's politics in my books because it gives the world's texture for me, and because I like investigating the ideas. If people do take away some of the politics then that's great, but I think I'd be setting myself up for serious disappointment as a socialist if that was my first aim *with the novels*. I don't think there's any replacement for traditional political activity and argument for pushing forward socialist politics.

I love weird fiction, ghost stories, horror comics and SF passionately, but they're not going to change the world. That's why I'm a novelist *and* an active revolutionary socialist.

# China Miéville's ten recommended Fantasy/science fiction novels

*This is not a list of the "best" fantasy or SF. Many superb works are not on the list. Those listed below are chosen not just because of their quality, but because the politics they embed (deliberately or not) are of particular interest to socialists. Of course, other works – by the same or other writers – could have been chosen.*

- Emma Bull and Steven Brust, *Freedom and Necessity* (1997). Bull is a left-liberal and Brust is a Trotskyist fantasy writer. *Freedom and Necessity* is set in the 19th century of the Chartists and class turmoil. It's been described as "the first Marxist steampunk" or "a fantasy for Young Hegelians".
- Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* (1938, trans 1967). Astonishing fantasy set in 1930s Moscow, featuring the Devil, Pontius Pilate, the Wandering Jew, and a satire and critique of Stalinist Russia so cutting it is unbelievable that it got past the censors. Utterly brilliant.
- Jane Gaskell, *Strange Evil* (1957). Written when Gaskell was 14. Though flawed in places it is still, however, extraordinary. A savage fairytale with fraught sexuality, meditations on Tom Paine and Marx, revolutionary upheaval depicted sympathetically but without sentimentality, plus the most disturbing baddie in fiction.
- Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974). The most overtly political of this anarchist writer's excellent works. An examination of the relations between a rich, exploitative capitalist world and a poor, nearly barren (though high-tech) communist one.
- Gregory Maguire, *Wicked* (1995). Brilliant revisionist fantasy about how the winners write history. The loser whose side is here taken is the Wicked Witch of the West, a fighter for emancipatory politics in the despotic empire of Oz.
- Mervyn Peake, *The Gormenghast Trilogy* (1946-1959). An austere depiction of dead ritualism and necessary transformation. Don't believe those who say that the third book is disappointing.
- Philip Pullman, *The His Dark Materials Trilogy* (1995-). Only two volumes so far published (*Northern Lights* and *The Subtle Knife*). This series deals with moral/political complexities with unsentimental respect for its (young adult) readers and characters. Explores freedom and social agency, and the question of using ugly means for emancipatory ends.
- Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Mars Trilogy* (1992-1996). Probably the most powerful centre of gravity for leftist science fiction in the 1990s. A sprawling and thoughtful examination of the variety of social relations feeding into and leading up to revolutionary change. (It's also got Gramsci jokes in it...)
- Norman Spinrad, *The Iron Dream* (1972). An SF novel by Adolf Hitler... Spinrad's funny, disturbing and savage indictment of the fascist aesthetic in much genre SF and fantasy. What if Hitler had become a pulp SF writer in New York? Not a book about that possibility but a book from it: "By the same author: *Triumph of the Will* and *Lord of the Swastika*." Brave and nasty.
- Michael Swanwick, *The Iron Dragon's Daughter* (1993). Great work that completely destroys the sentimental aspects of genre fantasy. From within the genre – fairies, elves and all – Swanwick examines the industrial revolution, the Vietnam War, racism and sexism, and the escapist dreams of genre fantasy. A truly great anti-fantasy. ■



*China Miéville out campaigning in the British general election*

# Girl in movement

*Girl in Movement: A Memoir*  
by Eva Kollisch  
Glad Day, 2000  
Reviewed by Andrew Cooper

You won't find this one in Whitcoulls – or any NZ library for that matter. Published by the obscure "Glad Day" collective from Thetford, Vermont, USA, it is held together with the sort of poor quality binding that, when I worked in a library, we would have tut-tutted at and sent straight off to the bindery, and not just for "stiffening" mind you, but for a *full* binding!

So, why am I reviewing this obscure memoir? Because, quite simply *Girl in Movement* is extraordinary.

It is not great literature (but Eva Kollisch is a more than competent writer), but it *is* a story that will appeal hugely to anyone interested in the history and more importantly in the future of our socialist tradition.

Eva, an Austrian Jewish refugee fleeing the Nazis with her family, ends up in New York's Staten Island in 1941 and, through sheer coincidence, befriends members of the Workers' Party - a tiny splinter group from the Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party.

Far from being the dull political rant you might expect, this memoir is incredibly touching in the way it describes a young woman's journey from political ignorance to being a member of "The Movement", working in factories and finding out about love, sex and friendship on the way.

The Workers' Party (WP), led by the mercurial Max Shachtman, had split from the SWP over the question of whether the USSR was a "degenerated workers's state." The WP though, understandably, (but still very unfortunately) clung to the belief that WW2 would end with "revolution in Europe and another Depression in America."

With the imminent prospect of the "unknown men" of the WP suddenly being propelled into national leadership

of the workers' movement, and the party itself supposedly being poised on the brink of enormous growth, its members were sent "To the Factories."

Eva describes working in sweatshops where the drudgery and sheer exhaustion of their exploitation made it impossible to interest the other workers in socialism. She was frequently sacked or quit jobs.

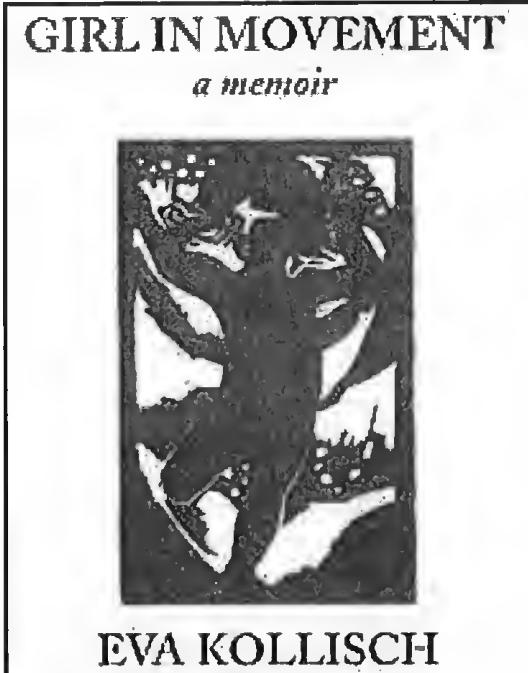
She marries Walter, a party organiser ten years her senior, before he, like many other members of the party, is drafted into the military and sent overseas.

Eva moves to Detroit and works in a defence plant making jeeps. There are excellent descriptions of the effects of the factory system and the ways the workers find to deal with the pace of work. She befriends a union militant and shop steward who leads a successful wildcat strike against both the bosses and the "Pork-chopper" union officials to defend an unfairly dismissed black worker. But when she rejects his sexual advances, Eva

is cold-shouldered by the other workers and by the party members for refusing to sleep with him to draw him into the Movement!

Distraught, she hitch-hikes aimlessly across America before ending up in California where a meeting with a family friend forces her to reassess her entire life in the Movement. Back in Detroit, she is put on "trial" by the branch for being absent without leave. Returning to New York, and still just 19, she breaks up with Walter, who is in the armed forces in Europe, and leaves the Movement.

Unlike many former revolutionary socialists, Eva Kollisch is able to look at her time in the Movement impartially and without her judgement being clouded by bitterness. Because of this she provides some extremely important lessons for those of us trying to build an



organisation today.

The Workers' Party was an extreme example of the tendency towards hyper-activism and grandiosity present in many far left groupings. It is no surprise that most socialist organisations have such a massive rate of membership turnover when you read this story – the new member, flushed with enthusiasm, is assured that with enough willpower and hard work the Movement will grow exponentially in just a year or two. When, after two, three or four years killing themselves they finally turn around and realise that the group has stood still or shrunk, disillusionment quickly sets in.

"Going to the workers" (in terms of attempting to build now in the factories)

– another tendency amongst many far left groups – is also powerfully debunked as a strategy. Rather than the expected embryonic revolutionary cells, the result invariably was one or two isolated and demoralised socialists in large workplaces, unable to relate to or recruit other workers.

*Girl in Movement* raises many other questions that space unfortunately

prevents a discussion of: the feeling that you have to be an "outsider" already in some ways (and as an Austrian Jewish refugee Eva certainly considered herself one) in order to accept the feeling of otherness of Movement life; the interdependence and problems involved in reconciling

a long-term commitment to the Movement with leading a life – how the otherness of Party life can coexist with the "real" world.

These are crucial questions for any organisation that wants to remain sane, healthy and keep members for more than a few months or years. They are not easy ones to confront, and they are not what we usually think about when we talk about "building."

Not surprisingly, at around the same time Eva left the WP in 1945, many other comrades were coming to similar conclusions. Whether it was the changes brought about by the war – the constant moving around the US which brought the reality of the Movement's insignificance into sharp focus; or the revelations about the Nazi death camps which caused many to reconsider their fundamental belief in humanity's progressive dynamic – or just that they had stood still and taken stock for the first time in years, the WP quickly collapsed.

So, *Girl in Movement* is:

A warning about what happens when a revolutionary organisation tries to hit the Fast Forward button on growth; A wonderful description of coming of age from a resolutely *political* perspective; An exploration of *some* experiences in "The Movement" that must be universal for many socialists.

#### Getting it

Your best options are either through one of the online bookstores, like Amazon.com, or direct from the publisher ([www.gladdaybooks.com](http://www.gladdaybooks.com)),

which might be a bit cheaper. You could also order it through a bookshop here, but that usually ends up being the most expensive option.

Better still, lobby your local library to get a copy. ■



*Eva Kollisch today*

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# just what are your politics anyway?

**The more observant among you may have noticed that this magazine's politics aren't quite the same as the mainstream media's. So just where do we stand? Below are some of the basic political ideas behind our magazine.**

**Socialism** Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need.

Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over its production or distribution. A new society can only be built when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and create a new state in which they will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

**Workers' Power** Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want.

Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power – a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils.

China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have nothing to do with socialism. They are repressive state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers against every ruling class.

**Revolution Not Reformism** Despite the claims of Labour, Alliance and trade union leaders, the structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class.

They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers.

There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

**Internationalism** Workers in every country are exploited by capitalism, so the struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle.

We oppose everything that divides workers of different countries. We oppose all immigration controls.

We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles.

**Liberation From Oppression** We fight for democratic rights. We are opposed to the oppression of women, Māori, Pacific Islanders, gays and lesbians. These forms of oppression are used to divide the working class.

We support the right of all oppressed groups to organise for their own defence.

All these forms of liberation are essential to socialism and impossible without it.

**Tino Rangatiratanga** We support the struggle for tino rangatiratanga.

Māori capitalists and politicians have no interest in achieving tino rangatiratanga for working class Māori.

The Government and corporate warriors' approach to Treaty claims has benefited a Māori elite while doing little for working class Māori.

Tino rangatiratanga cannot be achieved within capitalism. It will only become a reality with the establishment of a workers' state and socialist society.

**Revolutionary Organisation** To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by day to day activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

We are beginning to build such a party, linking the ideas of revolutionary socialism to workers' struggles against the system. If you agree with our ideas and want to fight for socialism, we urge you to join us.



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